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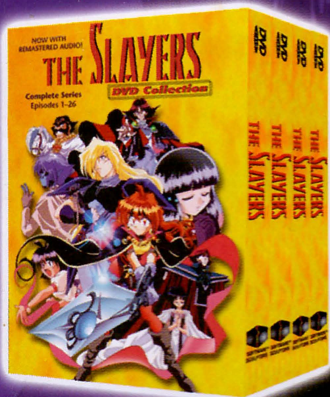
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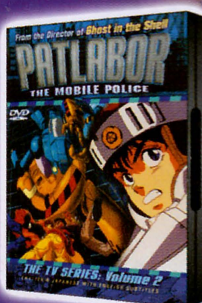


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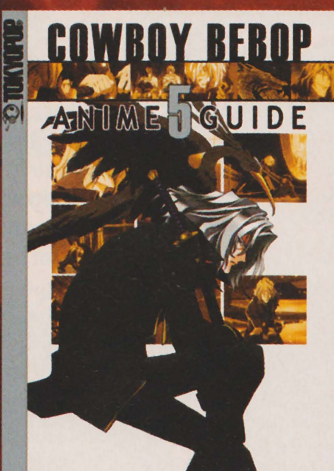
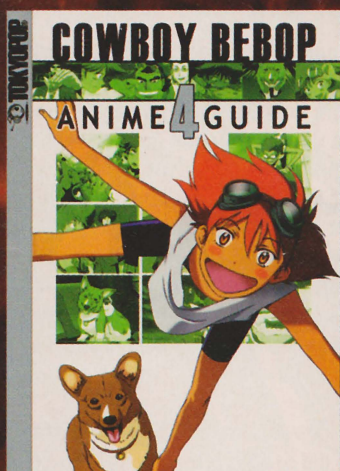
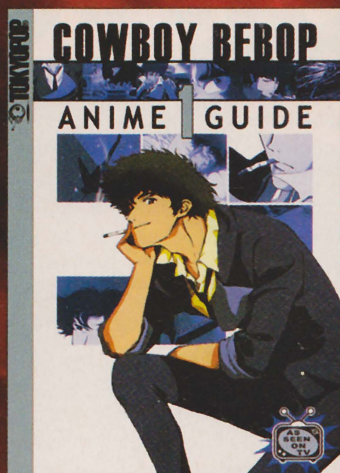
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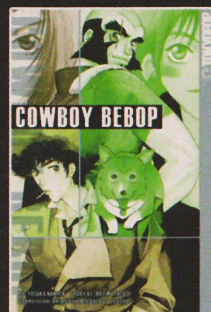
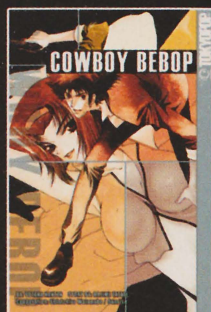
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ANIMERICA Vol. 10, No. 7 (July 2002)
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TOO SEXY, TOO SEXY!

So if you picked up this issue and wondered just what to expect—has *ANIMERICA* gone (gasp!)...*mature readers only*?—well, let me just set your minds at rest. No, this isn't a special issue on adult anime (although *Cowboy Bebop* on the cover should tell you that much). Just the opposite. Our "Sex Cels" feature is a tip of the hat to something we feel contributes significantly to anime's overall success, both in Japan and abroad—the appeal of its characters.

That anime characters are sexy almost goes without saying. Every month we get letters from readers explaining their terrible crush on *Dragon Ball Z*'s Vegeta or Trunks, or Sailor Moon, or *Love Hina*'s Naru—you name it. And that's not just because of the stories being told, either. I could write volumes on engaging plots or artistic animation styles, but even the newest fan could tell you that the simple *look* of the characters is a large part of the appeal. The very fact that there is such a thing as a recognized "manga style" or "anime style" is a testament to the fact that there's *something* about the way it looks—we receive letters on a regular basis from readers complaining about people criticizing an anime they love as "that *Sailor Moon* stuff" or "that *Pokémon* stuff." How to explain that, if not to say that there is a certain identifiable quality about the character style that even a casual eye can see?

Not to mention the fact that we just thought it sounded like a fun feature. I mean, really—rate the sexiest characters in anime? Not such a bad job.

Well...sort of. We started planning this feature at least a year ago, if I remember correctly—but when it came right down to the final choices, we realized just how big a job it was. What were we thinking to even undertake this? Even if we strictly limited ourselves to characters from manga and anime available in the U.S. (which we did end up doing more or less, simply because it cut down on the numbers to choose from and ensured at least *most* of the readership would know who we were talking about), that's still a long, long list. We literally revising the final lists right up until the day this issue shipped out. And we sent corrections after that.

Ultimately, though, we probably shouldn't have worried so much. After all, any list of favorites is, by definition, a case of personal preferences. So if your favorite wasn't duly represented, don't get mad! Write in and let us know which characters you think are pinup material.

Oh, and in case you're wondering—no, we didn't include many candidates from adult anime or manga (although we did drop in a few—see if you can find them). In general, what we find sexy about anime and manga characters is the same as we find intriguing about anime and manga in general—its well-rounded nature. If we have to choose, we'd rather give a nod to characters who come off as interesting *people* instead of simple 2D fantasy figures. Isn't that one of the things anime does best?

Julie Davis
 Editor in Chief



HONEY FLASH!

My own personal favorite butt-kicking anime girl is brought to life by this awesome 12" Cutey Honey doll, recently added to the Cy-Girls toy line. She's ridiculously poseable and is just the right size to take on my 12" Buffy! Check her out for yourself on the Blue Box toys homepage at www.blueboxtoys.com

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Violence



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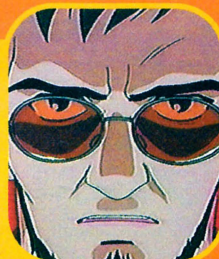
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PATRICKA MACIAS

Assistant Editor **PATRICK MACIAS**

(Spotlight: *Evangelion*) might well have trained to become a Science Ninja if not for the appearance of *Star Blazers* on TV few months after he first discovered *Battle of the Planets*. Now his life is devoted to "chocolate cake" and Captain Avatar's favorite "spring water."



JUSTIN KOVALSKY

In between planning a move to San Francisco in the summer months and writing historical articles about the Wing Chun Revolutionaries of Shaolin, freelance writer **JUSTIN KOVALSKY** (Spotlight: *Vagabond*) is thrilled about big hills and more kung fu in a new city. Also, he's in the recording studio this month cutting original songs for *Interstate Video Zine* (the only all East Coast skateboard magazine). Pick it up at your local skateshop!



EGAN LOO

When not moving apartments, attending conventions, traveling to Japan or other fan activities, **EGAN LOO** (Spotlight: *Crest of the Stars*) is a writer/translator for various nefarious undertakings, including the *Macross* (www.anime.net/macross/) and *Escaflowne* (www.anime.net/escaflowne/) Compendiums. Sleep is for wimps and people who haven't seen *Crest of the Stars*...



MATT LOPEZ

Getting ready to give up his life as a free-and-easy full-timer at Viz when he makes like Rodney Dangerfield and goes back to school this fall, **MATT LOPEZ** (Spotlight: *Silent Möbius*) is subsequently getting bumped down to part-time status. Summer promises to be eventful though. By the time you read this, Matt should be in Japan reporting on the Suzuka eight-hour motorcycle race for an American bike mag. Pray he doesn't stay there forever!



LANGUAGE KEY

How do we decide how to "spell" Japanese words in English? There are several systems for "romanizing" the Japanese language; *ANIMERICA* uses a modified Hepburn system, using the French *circumflex* to indicate doubled vowel sounds (e.g. "û" instead of "uu"). Modern proper names of Japanese origin (post-Meiji era) are presented in the Western style, with the given name followed by the family name, typically without diacritical marks in standard U.S. newspaper style, unless a specific spelling is requested by the individual, or is otherwise noted. For consistency's sake, characters appearing in manga and anime are referred to by the names used in their most common U.S.-licensed versions, unless otherwise noted.

NEW MANGA

BY KELLI BLACKWELL,
JULIE DAVIS, AND
ANDY NAKATANI



JUNKO MIZUNO'S **CINDERALLA**

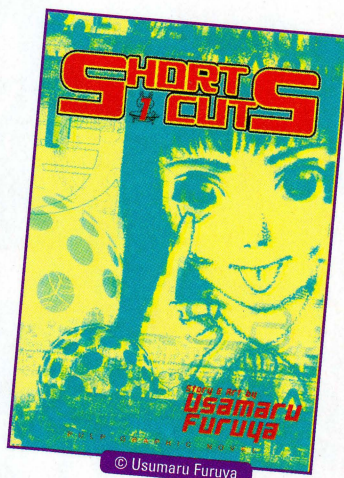
Originally serialized in (now sadly defunct) *PULP* magazine, *Junko Mizuno's Cinderella* is a unique artist's stylized take on the classic fairytale. With a style that's been described as "cute but deadly," Mizuno's delirious color illustrations have a Sanrio-like super-flat preciousness with elements of the grotesque. Enjoy her blackly humorous take on a fairytale where Cinderella's dad and the stepsisters are...zombies! Her family runs a *yakitori* restaurant, and the sickly prince is on permanent IV support! Class, labor, and the social role of women...it's all here in a story that turns the fable on its head. **MATURE READERS.** ☆

Graphic novel from Viz Comics: on sale 17 July; 120 color pages; US\$15.95

SHORT CUTS

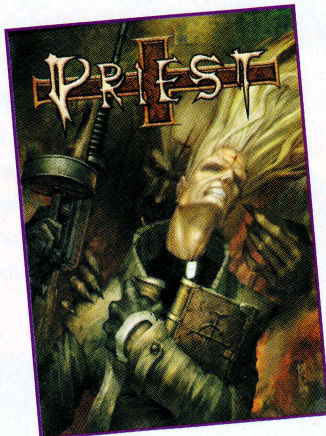
So you want to be a *ko-gal*, baby? With a deep, dark tan and cute schoolgirl uniform in perfect synch with fashions of the moment? Well, you'd have to live in Japan to be the real deal, but you can read about the wackiness of the whole spectacle of *ko-gal* gluttony in *Short Cuts*, a surreal, humor-strip-style manga that chronicles (and makes fun of) the *ko-gal* state of mind. Zany puns on shopping networks, weight-loss, school fashion sense, and things you never thought that Japanese schoolgirls ever thought about. **MATURE READERS.** ☆

Graphic novel from Viz Comics: on sale 23 June; 120 b&w pages; US\$12.95



PRIEST

Pardon *et moi*, *manga* or *man-wha*? Min-Woo Hyung's *Priest* is TOKYOPOP's third Korean *man-wha* series, following *Island* and *Ragnarok*. A horror-western, *Priest* follows the spine-tingling adventures of Ivan Isaacs, a former priest who sold his soul to a supernatural power and now uses his newfound abilities to fight the demon lord Temoraze and his zombie minions. In this volume, the famous gang leader Lizzie meets Ivan in a train holdup, and she decides to learn more about the demons, zombies, and de-frocked priests wandering the old West. Who wouldn't? ☆



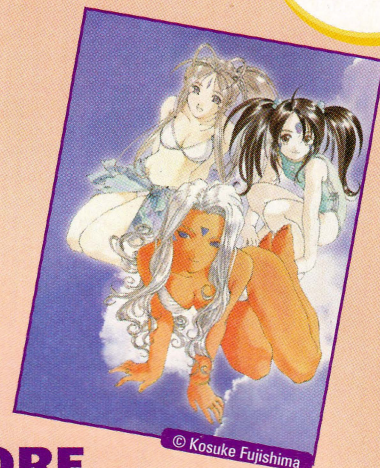
Graphic novel from TOKYOPOP: on sale 23 July; 176 b&w pages; US\$9.99

BASTARD!!

It's a cult sword-and-sorcery hit that comes in all forms: anime, manga, action figures...and aren't you curious what the story's all about? Okay, it goes like this: the kingdom of Metallicana is under attack by the dark forces of four evil armies sweeping the world. As orcs and giants besiege their citadel, the desperate defenders turn to a legend that a virgin's kiss may awaken "Dark Schneider," an ancient, chaotic, lecherous wizard sealed within the body of Lucien, a seemingly normal 14-year-old boy. So, the wizard's brought back, restrained (barely) by magic that forces him to obey his host body's teenage stepsister, Yoko! Now, he's got to face his former allies, the four kings of the dark armies of chaos. Hydras, dragons and armies of monsters...bloodstained Metallicana may never know peace again! **MATURE READERS.** ☆



Graphic novel from Viz Comics: on sale 10 July; 200 b&w pages; US\$14.95



MORE GODDESSES, MORE HEAVEN

Oh *My Goddess! Leader of the Pack* is the second of three "remastered" volumes that restores the "lost" *Oh My Goddess!* stories, filling in early details of student Keiichi Morisato's life with his live-in, literal goddess, the beautiful Belldandy. You can believe that the struggles of daily life—earning extra cash, looking for an apartment, the odd motorcycle race—play out a bit differently when you've got a supernatural stunner in your corner. But the blessings come along with the inevitable curses, like the unannounced arrival of Belldandy's older sister, Urd, a sexy spitfire determined to help Keiichi get over his shyness in his relationship with Belldandy—"help" him, that is, between the sheets! Includes some material from the previously published *1-555-Goddess*, plus the "lost" stories published in the anthology *SUPER MANGA BLAST!* ☆

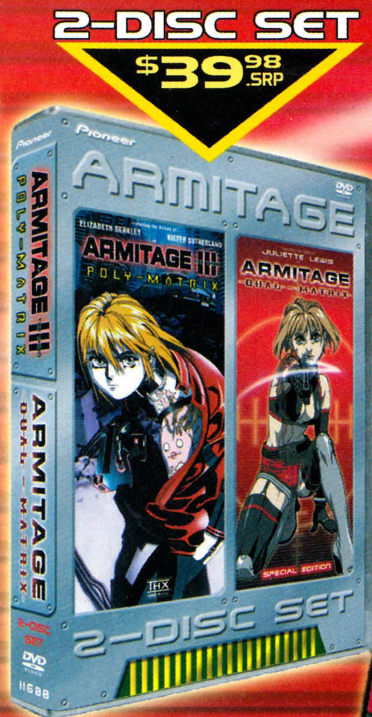
Graphic novel from Dark Horse: on sale 7 August; 152 b&w pages; 5 3/4 x 8 1/4; US\$13.95

THE BAD GIRL RETURNS!

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The **Blue Seed Perfect Collection**, a special collector's edition package containing the entire 26-episode **Blue Seed** TV series on four DVD discs. Based on the manga by Yuzo Takada (**3x3 Eyes**) **Blue Seed** is the story of evil shape-shifting monsters known as the Aragami who are making their grand play to gain control of the earth. Humanity's only chance for survival rests on the shoulders of Momiji, a young girl carrying an unborn Aragami in her chest; and Kusanagi, a servant of the Aragami rebelling against his masters in order to ensure mankind's survival. Watch the battle for earth's survival unfold! The Perfect Collection contains four bilingual discs; extras include character bios, original series trailers, clean credit animation, "Omake Theater" parodies, and ADV previews. ☆



Bilingual DVD from ADV
Films: on sale 18 June;
650 mins.; US\$59.98



YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

Get ready for high-speed comedy and drama from the creator of the hit series **Oh My Goddess!** **You're Under Arrest!** is the story about two young Tokyo policewomen: Natsume is a tomboy novice in love with motorcycles, and Miyuki is a sweet and knowledgeable veteran with the skills of a master mechanic. They get off to a rocky start when Miyuki busts Natsume for reckless driving on her way to work...and then they discover they're going to be partners! Will these two lethal weapons learn to get along?

You can get in on the **YUA** action yourself for the DVD release—AnimEigo is hosting a fan art contest especially for the upcoming **You're Under Arrest** DVD box set. Contestants can send in artwork to be judged by AnimEigo production staff. The prize for this contest is to have your (original, unpublished) artwork displayed on DVD! Learn the rules and regulations by visiting: <http://jayme.animeigo.com/> all entries must be received by **31 August 2002**. Send your fan art via e-mail for faster entry: yuacontest@animeigo.com or by mail: AnimEigo, YUA Fan Art Contest, P.O. Box 989, Wilmington, NC 28402. ☆

Bilingual DVD from AnimEigo: on sale July; 120 mins; US\$24.95

HELLSING

Just when you think that there are no new ways to retell the old story of vampires along comes an anime to prove you wrong. The mysterious United Kingdom Royal Protestant Organization (a.k.a. Hellsing) deploys its forces in the shadows to protect ordinary mortals from the undead legions of vampires and zombies who would prey upon them. Western-style gun-slinging action combined with English regality, a touch of Gothic romanticism, and a thousand gallons of blood and gore...what more can you ask for? Volume 1 of **Hellsing** contains three episodes, a gallery of character art, the "Hellsing 0" music video, non-credit opening animation, and a photo gallery devoted to the making of the new Japanese Alucard (read it backwards) action figure. (The first volume also comes with the option of a box to hold all of four volumes of the series.) For more info, check out the website: www.hellsingdvd.com. ☆

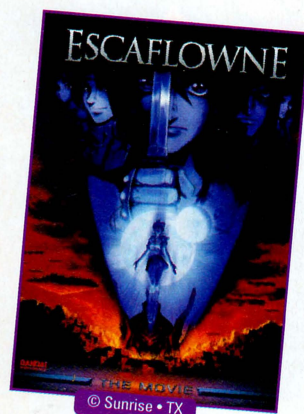


Bilingual DVD from Pioneer: on sale 23 July; 90 mins; US\$29.98/\$34.98 (with artbox)

ESCAFLOWNE

July brings a double-dose of stunning fantasy with **Escaflowne**, a sword-and-mecha anime with a wonderful musical score by Yoko Kanno (**Macross Plus**, **Cowboy Bebop**)! The world of Gaea is a mythical realm invisible from Earth, but where Earth can be seen in its sky. It's a world immersed in a world of blood and violence, where a schoolgirl named Hitomi helps aid the young Prince Van in a battle over the legendary suit of dragon armor, the Escaflowne. Explore Gaea for yourself on DVD in both TV series and movie versions. The **Escaflowne** movie comes in a standard edition (just the film) or the ultimate edition—a 3-disc set that includes the soundtrack CD, a production art gallery, staff and cast interviews, a musical performance by vocalist

Maaya Sakamoto and footage of the U.S. premiere. The TV series box set is limited to 10,000 units, all individually numbered, containing all 26 episodes, uncut and unedited, a character gallery, musical videos, and creator interviews. The TV series box set also comes with an exclusive **Escaflowne** action figure only available with the box set. ☆



Escaflowne the Movie: Bilingual DVD from Bandai: on sale 23 July; 110 mins; US\$29.98/\$49.98 • Escaflowne TV Series Box set from Bandai: on sale 23 July; 700 mins; US\$199.98



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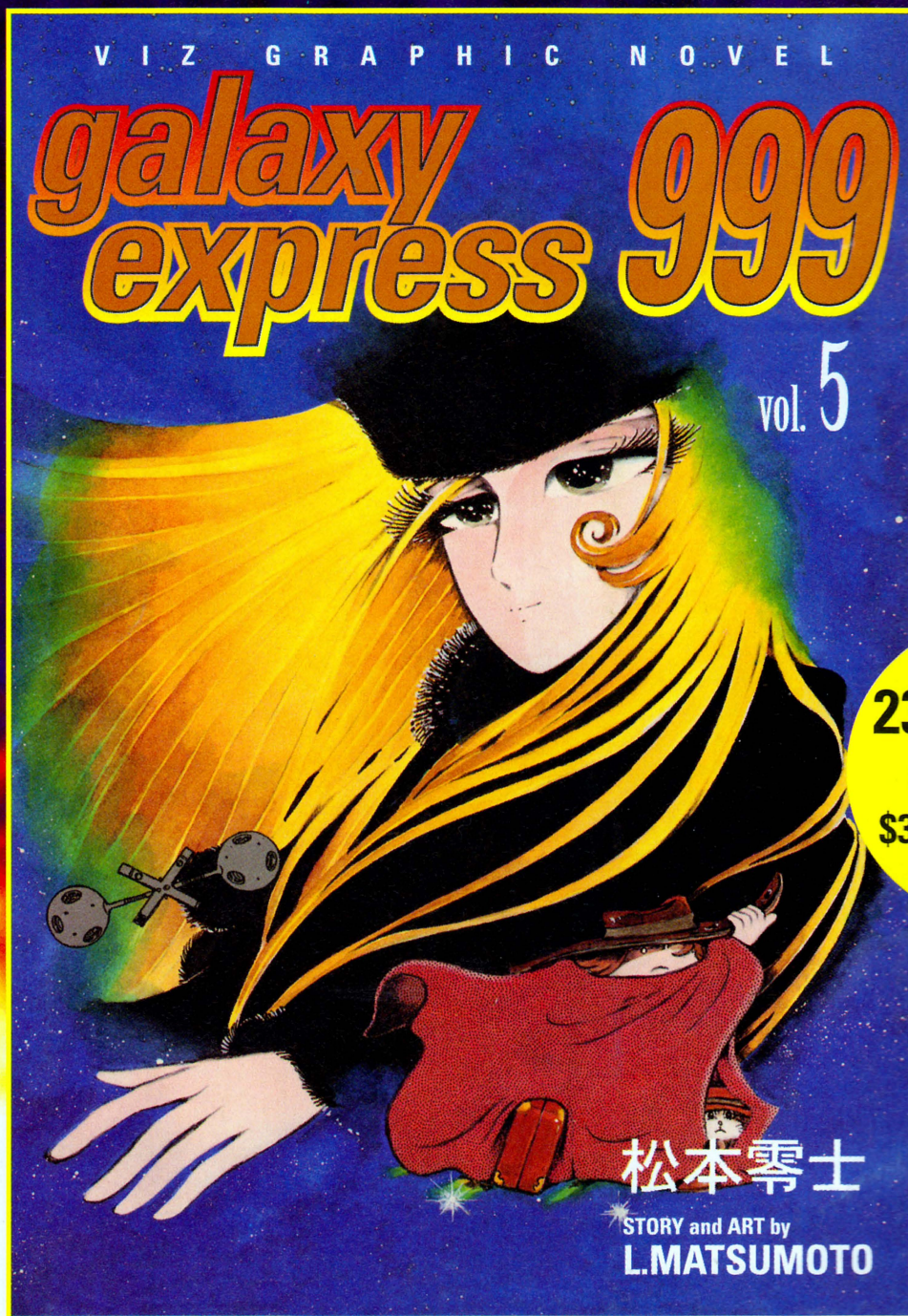
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• Trelaina and
Planet Telezart

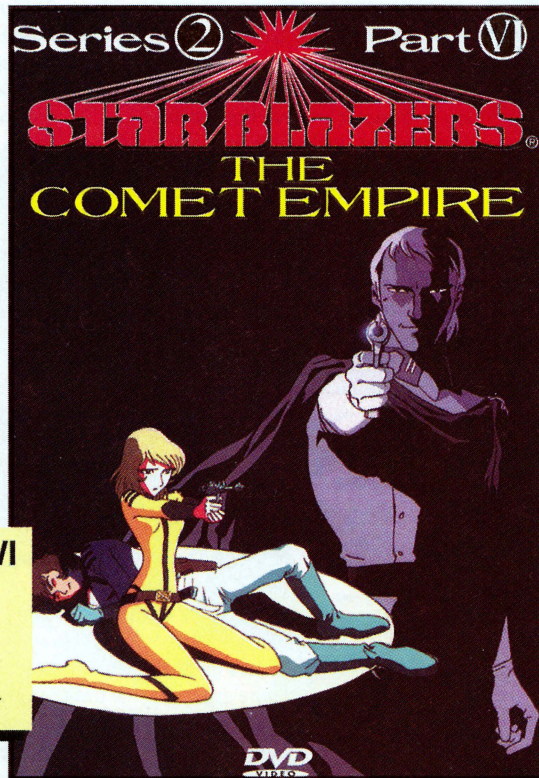
A year has passed since the Star Force
returned to save the Earth, but another
danger now approaches from deep space.
A gigantic White Comet hurtles toward
our galaxy, obliterating everything in its
path. But it is no ordinary comet—
it is the deadly Comet Empire,
conqueror of worlds . . . and Earth
is the next target! Against
orders, the Star Force blasts
off to investigate, but even
if they can get past the
flagship Andromeda,
they don't yet know
the true nature of
their new enemy!



Available July 2 • Part V

contains episodes 18 thru 21
with the following special feature:
Part 2 of an exclusive
interview with Tom Tweedy and
Amy Howard Wilson, the voice actors
for Mark Venture and Nova!

PLUS: The Earth Defense
Forces: Crews & Fleets



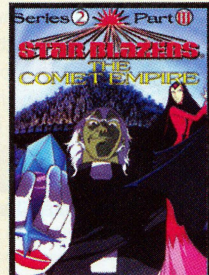
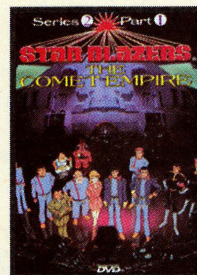
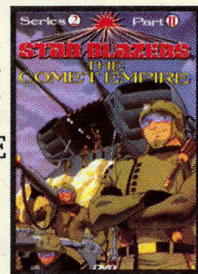
Available Sept. 3 • Part VI

contains episodes 22 thru 26
with the following special feature:
Tactical Maps:
Interactive mission map
of the Comet Empire War

For information on these DVDs, the Series1 DVD Collection and other Star Blazers related products
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OF THE
COMET EMPIRE
EACH WITH
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FEATURES!



NEW VIDEO

801 T.T.S. AIRBATS

Directed by Yuji Moriyama (*All Purpose Catgirl Nuku Nuku*, *Project A-Ko*), this comedy anime introduces the fighter pilots of the 801 Tactical Training Squadron, codenamed Airbats, the hottest, wildest team of female flyers you'll ever meet...or actually, that you'll meet the same way the team's new young male sidekick does, when he walks in on them in the shower. (You saw that coming, right?) Get ready for aerial action and comedy hijinks, from ghostbusting the spirit of a dead kamikaze Zero pilot, facing off against a team of world famous American aeronautical acrobats, or winning a year's supply of noodles in a ramen-eating contest, the Airbats have the "right stuff" to get the job done! All seven episodes on one bilingual disc; extras include production sketches, clean credit animation, trailer, Japanese cast "tidbits," and ADV previews. ☆



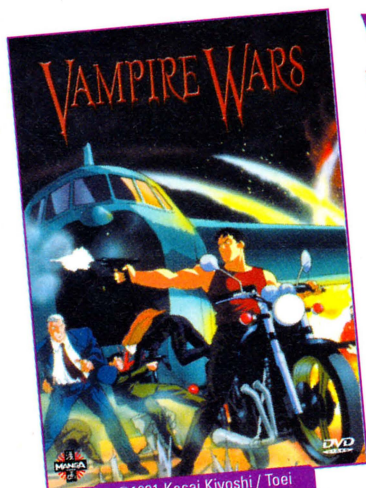
Bilingual DVD from ADV
Films: on sale 11 June;
175 mins.; US\$34.98



LEGEND OF HIMIKO

In a world where the dead walk, where good and evil exist as palpable forces, a darkness is stirring. The undead march against the cities of light, to capture the sacred fire that is the source of their power. But one hope remains. Called into this world by the magical flame, a young girl named Himiko is thrust into the maelstrom of danger, betrayal, and war. For she is heir to the sacred fire, and holds a power that could save its Guardians...if she survives! Produced by Ouji Hiroi (*Sakura Wars*, *Virgin Fleet*). First of four volumes. ☆

Bilingual DVD from U.S. Manga Corps: on sale 9 July; 100 mins; US\$29.95



VAMPIRE WARS

Vampires, vampires and more vampires! What else would you expect from a title like *Vampire Wars*? Modern-day vampires are set loose on a city to kill at will, and the mystery begins with a brutal terrorist attack on a NASA base deep in the Arizona desert. Ten days later, the corpse of a CIA man is found in Paris, floating in the Seine. Are the two events connected? Monsieur Lassar of the French Secret Service thinks there is a connection, and to help solve the puzzle, he hires International terrorist spy and master criminal Housaburo Huki. Huki discovers film superstar Lamia (note the name) Vindaw is the key to the mystery. She has become the focus of a CIA operation in Paris and more sinisterly, the target of a bizarre vampire cult. Can Huki get to the bottom of this and save the glamorous Miss Vindaw...or will he also become just another number in the bloody body count? ☆

Bilingual DVD from Manga Entertainment: on sale 30 July; 60 mins; US\$24.95

FANCY LALA

A 1988 TV series, *Fancy LaLa* is 26 episodes of every girl's fantasy of becoming a singing pop star! Fancy Lala Mihi is an ordinary 9-year old girl with big dreams. Like most young girls, she longs to become a popular idol singer (come on, we all wanted to be Britney Spears for at least one millisecond). Miho gets a lucky break when two fairies, Pigu and Mogu, present her with a special magic pen. With her newfound powers, ordinary Miho can turn herself into the charming 15-year-old Lala who is about to make her show biz debut. Of course Lala finds out nothing, not even dreams, is perfect.... Featuring artwork by Akemi Takada (*Kimagure Orange Road*). First of six DVD volumes. ☆



© 1988 Studio Pierrot

EX-DRIVER

In the future, all cars are controlled through artificial intelligence and everyone has forgotten how to drive. But technology isn't always a sure thing, and from time to time, these automatic cars get a little stir crazy and take innocent passengers on high-speed car trips. To solve this dangerous glitch the city has hired two chicks, Lorna and Lisa, elite traffic cops. The two girls are opposites in personality but the best of friends, together they are perfect "ex-drivers" ready to save the day. From AIC, the animation studio that brought you *Oh My Goddess!* and *You're Under Arrest!*. ☆

Bilingual DVD from Anime Works: on sale 30 July; 100 mins. US\$24.95



FINAL FANTASY VII

ファイナルファンタジーVII

A welcome addition
to the
FINAL FANTASY VII
coldcast series!!



FINAL FANTASY VII 1/8 Scale Prepainted Coldcast Statue Series



Cloud Strife & Hardy Daytona



Aeris Gainsborough



Sephiroth



Cloud Strife



Yuffie Kisaragi



NEW!

Tifa Lockhart(#2)

Vincent Valentine

Highly detailed coldcast statue measuring
10 inches tall. Comes with base.



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and on becoming a Diamond customer, please call Michel Buster at (410) 560-7100, ext. 308.

NEW VIDEO

COSMO WARRIOR ZERO

A classic legend of honor among warriors by Leiji Matsumoto (*Galaxy Express 999*, *Queen Emeraldas*, *Harlock Saga*). The time of lawlessness in deep space is coming to a close. Men who have given up their souls to become robotic immortals have dominated Earth, and their cold grip is closing on the Sea of Stars. Warrior Zero, a battle-weary admiral, lost his family and his reason for living in during the war for Earth. Now serving the mechanized victors, Zero carries out his orders without the will to resist. Then, he received one mission unlike any other. Zero was commanded to travel to the farthest reaches of the universe to hunt down a single wanted man who also happens to be his former best friend—a mysterious space pirate once known to all as...Captain Harlock! ☆



© 2001 LEIJI MATSUMOTO/PROJECT ZERO

Bilingual DVD from Anime Works:
on sale 30 July; 100mins; US\$24.95



© 1994 Sony Music Entertainment

DVD from Manga
Entertainment: on sale
July; 60 mins; US\$24.95

TOKYO REVELATION

A satanic program is activated aboard a crowded commercial flight headed for Tokyo. It releases a swarm of invisible demons that send the aircraft plunging to a fiery doom. Everyone aboard is killed instantly except Akito Kobayashi, owner of the devilish program and sworn ally of hell itself. Kojiro Soma, an old elementary school friend of Akito's, is surprised to see him back in school, and can't help but notice how this once lonely boy has grown into a suave and arrogant teenager. Then, when his classmates are attacked and legendary demons return to stalk the streets of Tokyo, Kojiro begins to truly understand what his old friend has become. But why has Akito made this deal with the devil? What does he want from Kojiro? ☆

NEW TOYS

LAIN ACTION FIGURE

Aw! It's adorable! This July, Toynami is bringing out two new action figures of the title character from the *Serial Experiments Lain* series, both a school uniform version and this oh-so-cute bunny suit version, "Pajama Lain." Kewt! Both dolls are 8" tall, fully poseable, and come with real clothes—the slippers on Pajama Lain are removable and schoolgirl Lain comes with a backpack and computer laptop. ☆

Action figure from Toynami:
on sale July; US\$24.99



© 1998 Triangle Staff/Pioneer LDC

NEW BOOKS

CALENDARS

Lots of anime calendars are on offer to get you through 2003. If you have fond memories of Saturday mornings spent watching *Battle of the Planets*, there's a 12" x 12" calendar with 12 classic images of the G-Force team! If you'd like more curvaceous babes than costumed superheroes, check out the Ladies of Anime calendar, with vixens from Pioneer anime titles such as *Tenchi Muyo!*, *Armitage*, *Trigun*, *Amazing Nurse Nanako*, and more. If you'd like a few guys mixed in as well, try the Best of Anime calendar, with 12 images for more Pioneer's best, such as *Serial Experiments Lain*, *El Hazard*, and more. Need some Sailor Scouts to get you through the year? Yes, there is a *Sailor Moon* 2003 calendar. Still collecting Pokémon?

Three 16-month wall calendars let you catch three new Pokémon a month. Finally, check out the oversized 10" x 14" Masamune Shirow calendar, with illustrations from *Intron Depot 2: Blades* and more of his best color artwork, including commentary by the artist. ☆



Anime Calendars: approx. US\$12 ~ \$14; check a retail or comic store near you or Diamond Distributors' Previews catalog for more calendars and goods.

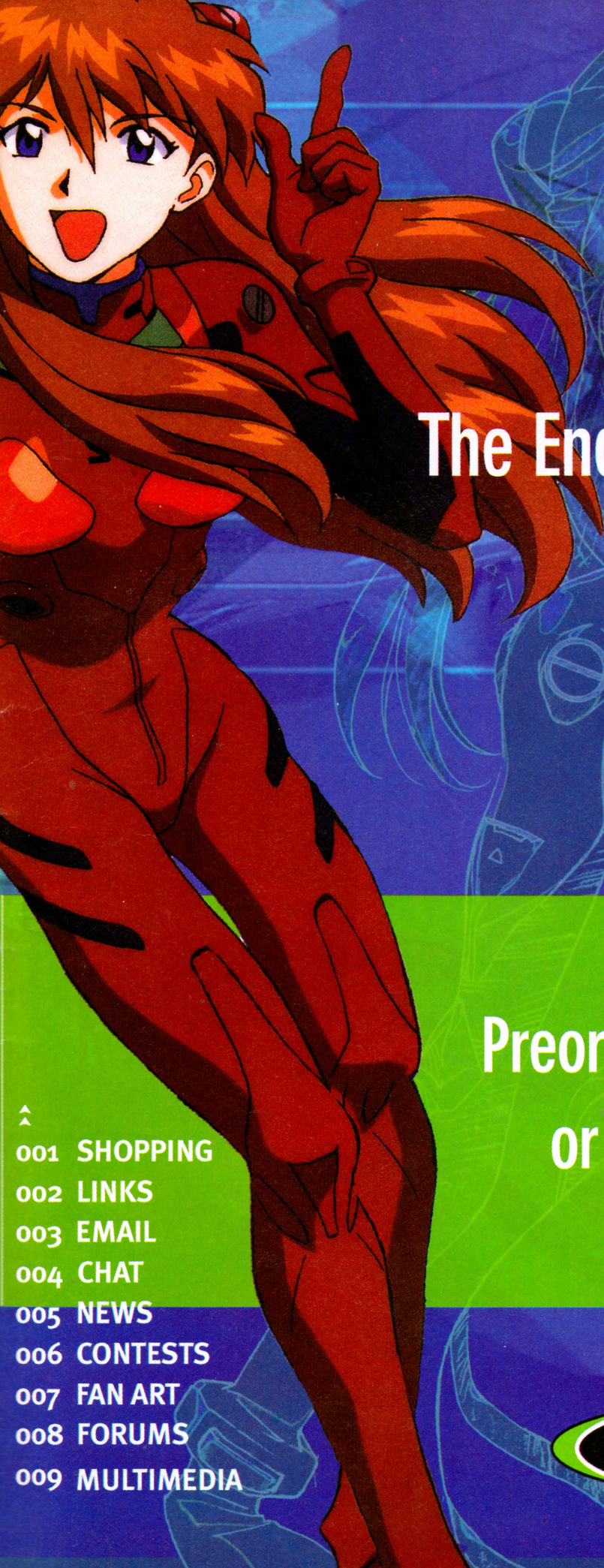
NIEA UNDER 7 ULTIMATE FAN GUIDE

This is a guide any *Niea* fan needs for a show that has an uncanny surrealistic, and wacky sense of itself. This authorized Ultimate Fan Guide features detailed episode summaries, in-depth character profiles, setting and theme analysis. To top it off, also thrown in, are role-playing character sheets for Guardians of Order's popular *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* RPG. Inside are hundreds of full-color images from the series, and many pages of production line-art. This Ultimate Fan Guide is the definitive English-language resource book for *Niea Under 7*. ☆

Art book from
Guardians of Order: on
sale now; 112 b&w and
color pages; US\$24.95



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ANIMATION

NEW ON TV

AZUMANGA DAIOH

Chiho Mihama is a precocious but cute 10-year-old genius in high school. This animated TV series features short stories about the everyday high school lives of Chiho, her classmates, and their teachers. The key word for this series is "cute." Based on Kiyohiko Azuma's four-panel manga serialized in *COMIC DENGEKI DAIOH*. Directed by Nishikiori Hiroshi (*Angelic Layer*), character designs by Yasuhisa Kato, with series story editor Ichiro Okochi (*"Turn A" Gundam*, *Angelic Layer*). Take a look at the Imagica studio website at www.imagica.com/shop/azumanga/. ☆

Animated TV series: on-air in Japan on Mondays at 1:25 a.m. on TV Tokyo. Also on-air Monday through Friday at 7:45 p.m. on AT-X.

PITA-TEN

Based on Koge Donbo's manga serialized in *DENGEKI COMIC GAO*, *Pita-Ten* is the story of Kotaro, a sixth grader who is preparing for his junior high school entrance exams. His mother passed away when he was much younger and he lives with his father who is very busy with his work. A girl named Misha moves in next door and disrupts Kotaro's life. She tells Kotaro that she is an angel and she will do anything to make him happy.... She does her best to help him out, but things don't always work out for the best. Then another girl named Shia moves in with Misha—she's sweet and cute, but if Misha is an angel, does that mean Shia is a devil? Directed by Toshifumi Kawase (*Beyblade*, *Eat-Man '98*) and Yuzo Sato (*Bio-Hunter*), series story editor Akemi Omode (*Gundam Wing: Blind Target*), and character designs by Kyuta Sakai. TV Osaka has a webpage up (in Japanese, of course) at www2.tv-osaka.co.jp/pitaten/. ☆

Animated TV series on-air in Japan on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. on TV Osaka and TV Tokyo. DVD and video on sale in Japan in June.

RIZERU MINE

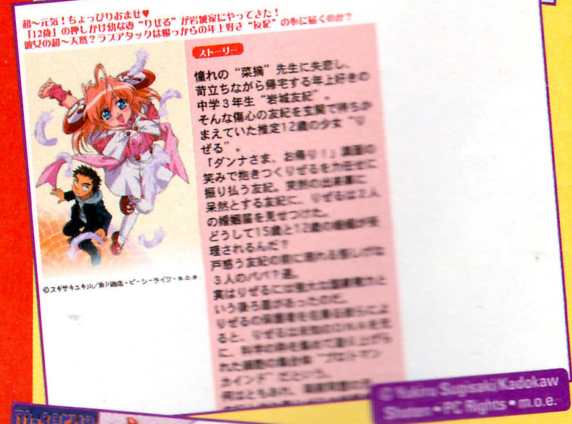
Yuki comes home one day to find a cute girl named Rizeru waiting at home to greet him as his new fiancée. Rizeru's three "men in black" guardians explain that Rizeru was created with the latest technology and that she is actually a collection of nanotechnology cells called "Proto Mankind." The full power of the government is behind the Proto Mankind project and Yuki's parents have agreed to the engagement. The only problem is that Yuki is fifteen and Rizeru is only twelve—and Yuki is only attracted to older women. Rizeru starts attending junior high school with Yuki and the romantic comedy antics begin! Based on Yukiru Sugisaki's manga currently serialized in *GEKKAN ACE NEXT*. Directed by Yasuhiro Matsumura (*Oh My Goddess!*); series story editor and scriptwriter is Naruhisa Arakawa (*Blue Seed*, *Iria: Zeiram the Animation*, *Steel Angel Kurumi*); character designs and animation direction are by Miwa Oshima (*Meitantei Conan*). See www.pc-moe.com/rizeru/main.html. ☆

Animated TV series on-air in Japan on TVH Wednesdays at 1:25 a.m./TVQ Mondays at 2:10 a.m./TVQ Tuesdays at 2:45 a.m./AT-X Monday through Friday 7:45 and Saturdays at 9:00 a.m.

JUNIKOKKI

A normal high school girl named Yoko gets taken away to an alternate reality by a handsome blond man. This strange alien world is divided up into 12 countries (hence the title *Junikokki* ("Tale of 12 Countries")) and is similar to the civilization of ancient China. Facing exciting challenges and obstacles, this alternate reality sets the stage for Yoko's growth and maturation into becoming a woman. Based on the novels by Fuyumi Ono published by Kodansha. Directed by Tsuneo Kobayashi (*GALS!*), character designs by Akihiro Yamada (*Lodoss War*, *Rahxephon*), and written by Noboru Aikawa (*The Hakkenden*, *Vampire Princess Miyu*). No official page that we could find, but take a look at <http://www.jvcmusic.co.jp/m-serve/tv/junikokki/index.html> for info on the soundtrack CDs and the Kodansha site at www.bookclub.kodansha.co.jp/books/junikokki/ for info about the comic version. ☆

Animated TV series on-air in Japan on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. on NHK BS 2.



Available on
VHS and DVD
July 2002



The cars are hot but the girls are hotter! Pull over, highway patrol. Lorna Endou and Lisa Sakakino have *éX-Driver* licenses, assigned only to the best of the best. They're authorized to drive fast, drive recklessly, and hunt down malfunctioning AI-controlled cars that endanger the populace. With cars as tricked out as their moves, Lorna and Lisa rule the road!

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ANIME RADAR



ANIME TOP TEN

The bestselling animated videos (on DVD), compiled by Original Confidence Research Company (as of 4/8/02)

1. *Final Fantasy Standard Edition*
Amuse/Toshiba Digital Frontier • ¥3,800
2. *KURENAI NO BUTA*
PORCO ROSSO
Buena Vista Home Entertainment • ¥4700
3. *Love Hina Again "Keitaro"*
King Records • ¥3,800
4. *Mahoromatic • 4*
Pioneer LDC • ¥5,000
5. *Kidô Senshi Gundam ZZ Part 1*
(*Mobile Suit Gundam ZZ Part 1*)
Bandai Visual • ¥24,000
6. *Love Hina Again "Naru"*
King Records • ¥3,800
7. *Mazinkaiser • 4*
Bandai Visual • ¥2,800
8. *Fruit Basket • 7*
King Records • ¥5,500
9. *Fruit Basket • 6*
King Records • ¥6,000
10. *Mahoromatic • 5*
Pioneer LDC • ¥5,000

ファイナルファンタジー

紅の豚

ラブひな

まほろまでいっく

機動戦士ガンダムZZ

ラブひな

マジンカイザー

フルーツバスケット

フルーツバスケット

まほろまでいっく

PLEASE NOTE:

Our translations are indicated with parentheses and quotes, while English titles provided by the author/publisher are set in all caps.



MANGA TOP TEN

The bestselling comics, compiled by Books Nippan, Japan (based on sales figures as of 3/31/02)

1. *Hikaru no Go • 16*
(*Go Master Hikaru*)
Yumi Hotta and Takeshi Kobata • Shueisha • ¥390
2. *Vagabond • 12*
Takehiko Inoue • Kodansha • ¥524
3. *Inu-Yasha • 25*
Rumiko Takahashi • Shogakukan • ¥390
4. *Hanazakari no Kimitachi e • 17*
(*"To the Blooming Generation"*)
Hisaya Nakajo • Hakusensha • ¥390
5. *Ppoi! • 19*
(*"Full of it"*)
Takako Yamazaki • Hakusensha • ¥390
6. *Saiyuki • 9*
Kazuya Minekura • Enix • ¥762
7. *Naruto • 11*
Masashi Kishimoto • Shueisha • ¥390
8. *Monster • 18*
Naoki Urasawa • Shogakukan • ¥552
9. *Sora wa Akai Kawa no Hotori • 27*
(*"Heaven on the Shores of a Red River"*)
Chie Shinohara • Shogakukan • ¥390
10. *Angel Heart*
Tsukasa Hojo • Shinchosha • ¥505

ヒカルの碁

バガボンド

犬夜叉

花ざかりの君たちへ

っぽい

最遊記

NARUTO

MONSTER

天は赤い河のほとり

エンジェル・ハート



ANIME TOP FIVE

ased on video preorders for May 2002,
compiled by Diamond Distribution Company

1. *Evangelion Movie: Death & Rebirth*
(*Bilingual DVD*)
Manga Entertainment • US\$29.95
2. *Ruruoni Kenshin • Vol. 18: Fall From Grace*
(*Bilingual DVD*)
Anime Works • US\$29.95
3. *Love Hina • Vol. 3*
(*Bilingual DVD*)
Bandai • US\$29.98
4. *Adventures of the Mini-Goddesses • Vol. 3: The Urd Files*
(*Bilingual DVD*)
Pioneer • US\$29.98
5. *Gundress the Movie*
(*Bilingual DVD*)
Anime Works • US\$29.95



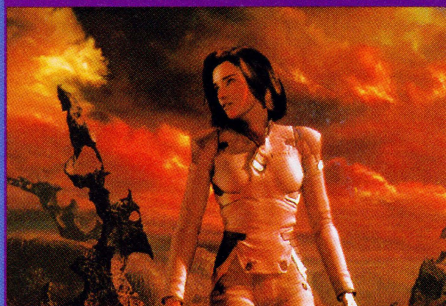
MANGA TOP TEN

Based on preorders for May 2002, compiled by Diamond Distribution Company

1. *Oh My Goddess! Part XI #10 Mystery Child*
Kosuke Fujishima • Dark Horse Comics • US\$3.99
2. *Blade of the Immortal #68: Beasts*
Hiroaki Samura • Dark Horse Comics • US\$2.99
3. *Dragon Ball Z Part 5 #5*
Akira Toriyama • Viz Comics • US\$2.95
4. *Dragon Ball Part 4 #10*
Akira Toriyama • Viz Comics • US\$2.95
5. *Cannon God Exxaxion #7 Stage 1*
Kenichi Sonoda • Dark Horse Comics • US\$2.99
6. *Super Manga Blast! #22*
Anothology • Dark Horse Comics • US\$5.99
7. *Ranma 1/2 Part 11 #3*
Rumiko Takahashi • Viz Comics • US\$2.95
8. *All-New Tenchi Muyo #1*
Hitoshi Okuda • Viz Comics • US\$2.95
9. *Gundam Wing: Endless Waltz #3*
Koichi Tokita • TOKYOPOP • US\$2.95
10. *Neon Genesis Evangelion Part 7 #1*
Yoshiyuki Sadamoto and GAINAX • Viz Comics • US\$3.50



#1 ANIME FINAL FANTASY



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In July, The Revolution Continues!

Revolutionary Girl UTENA



MANGA BY
Chiho Saito

STORY BY
Be-Papas



As serialized in
monthly manga anthology



ANIME RADAR

Anime Info for the Otaku Generation.



DOMESTIC ANIME RELEASES

All info is as accurate and timely as possible; however, last-minute changes do occur. Some titles are available earlier when ordered directly from their U.S. manufacturer. Unless other languages are noted, "bilingual" refers to English and Japanese audio tracks.

JUNE 2002

6/18/02

Blue Seed Perfect Collection
[Bilingual DVD]
ADV Films • US\$59.98

Golden Boy: Bound for Glory
[Bilingual DVD]
ADV Films • US\$29.98

Love Hina • Vol. 3: Secret Lives
[Bilingual DVD]
Bandai • US\$29.98

Silent Möbius DVD Collection 1
[Bilingual DVD]
Bandai • US\$44.98

Saber Marionette J to X: Program 02
[Bilingual DVD]
Bandai • US\$29.98

Soul Hunter • Vol. 5: City of Fire
[Bilingual DVD]
ADV Films • US\$29.98

6/25/02

Armitage III: Dual-Matrix
[English DVD/DVD Special Edition]
Pioneer • US\$19.98/\$29.98

Armitage III: Dual-Matrix/Poly-Matrix 2-Disc Set
[Bilingual DVD]
Pioneer • US\$39.98

Armitage III: Dual-Matrix DVD Lunch Box Set
[Bilingual DVD]
Pioneer • US\$69.98

City Hunter: Secret Service
[Bilingual DVD]
ADV Films • US\$29.98

Ghostsweeper Mikami
[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Manga Entertainment • US\$19.95/\$24.95

NEW DATE Gundress the Movie
[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Anime Works • US\$19.95/\$29.95

His and Her Circumstances • Vol. 2: Love and War Under the Cherry Blossoms
[Bilingual DVD]
The Right Stuff • US\$29.95

NEW DATE Kitty Pleasure Pack 2: Countdown to Delight and Crime of Passion
[Bilingual DVD]
Kitty Media • US\$29.95

NEW DATE Knight Hunters • Vol. 3: Lonely Heart
[English VHS/Subtitled VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Anime Works • US\$24.95/\$24.95/\$29.95

Kurogane Communications • Vol. 3: Future Horizons
[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Anime Works • US\$19.95/\$24.95

La Blue Girl Live-Action
[Bilingual DVD]
Kitty Media • US\$29.95

Lesson of Darkness
[Bilingual DVD]
Kitty Media • US\$29.95

Medabots • Vol. 2: Robattle!
[English VHS/DVD]
ADV Films • US\$14.98/\$19.98

Rurouni Kenshin • Vol. 19: Dreams of Youth
[English VHS/Subtitled VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Anime Works • US\$24.95/\$24.95/\$29.95

Psychic Wars
[Bilingual DVD]
Manga Entertainment • US\$24.96

The Vanilla Series: Campus
[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
Critical Mass • US\$19.98/\$24.95

Vampire Wars
[Bilingual DVD]
Manga Entertainment • US\$24.95

JULY 2002

7/9/02

Card Captor Sakura • Vol. 10: School Daze
[Subtitled VHS/DVD]
Pioneer • US\$24.98/\$29.98

Cardcaptors • Vol. 9: Star Power
[English VHS/DVD]
Pioneer • US\$14.98/\$24.98

Fancy LaLa • Vol. 1: A Star is Born!
[Bilingual DVD]
Bandai • US\$29.98

Gate Keepers • Vol. 6: Discovery!
[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
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[English VHS/Bilingual DVD]
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ANIME RADAR

CONVENTION UPDATE NEWS

22- 23 JUNE • JAFAX

Location: Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan
Guests: Steve Bennett, James Dawsey, Robert DeJesus, Doug Smith, Amy Howard Wilson

Membership Rates: FREE ADMISSION

Hotel Prices: Hampton Inn: US\$68/per night. Mention GVSU for special discount. Please call hotel for reservations: 616-647-1000 Comfort Inn: US\$79/per night. Mention GVSU for special discount. Please call hotel for reservations: 616-667-0733

Email: info@jafax.com

Website: www2.gvsu.edu/~anime/jafax/

4-7 JULY • ANIME EXPO

Location: Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach, CA

Guests: Nobuhiro Watsuki, Koichi Mashimo, more TBA

Membership Rates: US\$50 for 3-day pass; US\$40 for 2-day pass; US\$25 for 1-day pass. Group discount available until 15 May.

Hotel Prices: Hyatt Regency Hotel: US\$139/single, double, please call hotel for reservations, 562-491-1234. Westin Hotel: US\$125/single, double, please call hotel for reservations: 562-436-3000.

Email: reg@anime-expo.org

Website: www.anime-expo.org

13-14 JULY • ANIMETHON

Location: Grand MacEwan Community College, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Membership Rates: Free admission with donation to the Edmonton Food Bank.

Hotel Prices: Westin Hotel: US\$189.00/ single, double. Sheraton Edmonton: US\$164.00/single, double

Email: webmaster@animethon.org

Website: www.animethon.org

19-21 JULY • ANIMECON 2002

Location: Collegio Marista Arquidiocesano, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Membership Rates: R\$30.00 for 3-day pass, R\$10.00 per day

Hotel Prices: Carillon Plaza Hotel: call hotel for reservations and rates, (11) 3258-8766

Address: Rue Loefgreen, 859 Vila Mariana, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Website: www.animecon.com.br

19-21 JULY • SHOUJOCON

Location: East Brunswick Hilton, East Brunswick, NJ

Guests: Jamie McGonnigal, Bill Timoney; artists Azusa Kurokawa, Umbrella Studios

Membership Rates: US\$40 weekend pass before 16 June; US\$45 at the door; US\$35 Friday/Saturday or Saturday/Sunday passes.

Hotel Prices: Brunswick Hilton Towers: US\$95/single, double. Please call hotel for reservations and rates 1-800-HILTONS. Mention "shoujocon" for discount.

Email: registration@shoujocon.com

Website: www.shoujocon.com

26-28 JULY • OTAKON

Location: Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, Maryland

Guests: Steve Bennett, Fred Perry, Neil Nadelman, Fred "Piro" Gallagher

Membership Rates: US\$45 for 3-day pass by 8 July

Hotel Prices: Wyndham Baltimore Inner Harbor: US\$126/night, please call hotel for reservations 410-752-1100. Renaissance Harborplace: US\$189/night, please call hotel for reservations: 1-800-535-1201.

Address: Otakon 2002 Registration, 491 Baltimore Pike #689, Springfield, PA 19064-3810.

Email: info@otakon.com

Website: www.otakon.com





Costume photos
from Anime Central
2002
by Kevin Lillard;
www.fansview.com

TV UPDATE

Anime on TV in the US!*

ABC FAMILY CHANNEL www.abcfamily.go.com

If you can't find Fox Family, this is probably why. Currently find *Digimon: Digital Monsters* on weekdays at 7:00 a.m. for one hour, *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* and *Medabots* follow right after. It all depends on where you live, so check your local listings for dates and times.

ACTION CHANNEL www.starzencore.com

This Starz Network cable channel airs anime movies and complete series on a rotating basis.

CARTOON NETWORK www.cartoonnetwork.com

The current leader of popular anime has re-launched their Toonami Reactor website on www.cartoonnetwork.com. There you will find *Record Of the Lodoss War*, *Star Blazers*, *Harlock Saga* and *Patlabor* with *ANIMERICA* helping with information and opinions on the site! On CN TV watch all the action you need with *Dragon Ball*, *Dragon Ball Z*, and *Zoids* almost everyday. Saturday nights from 11:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. (ET/PT) find the Adult Swim Action block with *Outlaw Star*, *Yu Yu Hakusho*, *Pilot Candidate*, *Cowboy Bebop*, *Gundam 0083*, and *Tenchi Muyo!* Add something new to the shuffle with *Hamtaro*, the cutest hamsters in the world, airing weekdays at 4:00 p.m. Don't miss it!

CINEMAX www.cinemax.com

This premium cable movie channel shows a variety of anime. This month find a number of anime movies on a rotating basis. Please check the Cinemax website for more details.

ENCORE www.starzencore.com

This Starz network channel airs anime on occasion, please check their Website for listings.

FOX FAMILY CHANNEL www.foxfamilychannel.com

This channel has great children's programming, including *Monster Rancher*, which airs weekday mornings.

FOX KIDS www.foxkids.com

Now part of the ABC Family and you can still find some anime here with: *Digimon*, *Power Rangers*, *Medabots*, *Transformers* and *Mon Colle Knights* on Saturday mornings. FoxKids' show-times can change depending on where you live. Make sure to check your local listings for programming information in your area.

INTERNATIONAL CHANNEL www.i-channel.com

Find Japanese anime on this channel, usually airing late at night. *Dragon Ball Z* and *Slayers*, in Japanese, of course, airing at 10:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. (ET/PT)

INDEPENDENT FILM CHANNEL www.ifctv.com

Showcasing various anime titles from time to time. As of late, not much activity.

KIDS WB www.kidswb.com

The channel to find your favorite *Pokémon* characters. Enjoy *Pokémon: Johto Journey*, *Pokémon: Champions*, and more *Pokémon!* And don't forget, *Cardcaptors* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* are airing during the Toonami block weekdays and Saturday mornings.

LOCOMOTION www.locomotion.com

This channel airs anime throughout Latin America—so many great anime shows that I wish I could understand Spanish! Check out their website to see their amazing lineup.

SCI-FI CHANNEL www.scifi.com

USA Networks' Sci-Fi channel airs anime features from time to time. Check their listings for programs, dates and times. Currently, no activity in the anime department.

SHOWTIME www.showtimeonline.com

This cable movie channel shows a variety of anime; check their website for the program schedule.

TELEMUNDO www.telemundo.com

Check your local listing for dates and times, you might find *Dragon Ball Z* airing in Spanish.

LOCAL TV

KTEH www.kteh.org (PBS Silicon Valley, CA)

The PBS affiliate in San Jose, California, continues to be different than the average public TV station. Find *Dirty Pair Flash* airing at 9:30 p.m. on Sunday nights, and later, if you're still awake, find *Sakura Wars* at 1:30 a.m. Support your local public television station—together we can make a difference and finally put some cool anime on the air in our community.


Various independent U.S. TV stations air anime programs. If your local channel is airing anime, please write to us and let us know so we can add it to this section. (Please include the city and the station's call letters.)

*Please check your local listings for dates and times.

BY KELLI BLACKWELL

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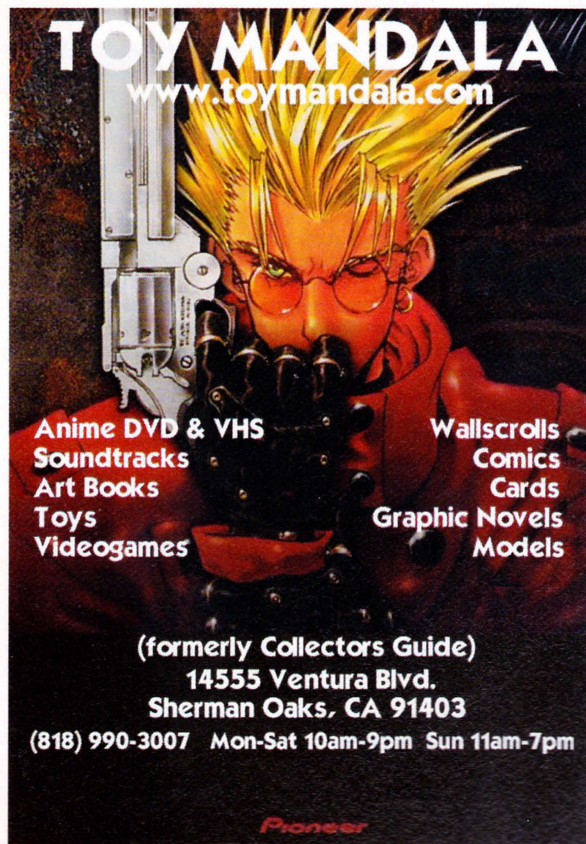
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ANIME AMERICA SPOTLIGHT

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

新世紀エヴァンゲリオン

IS THIS THE END? A CHOOSE-YOUR-OWN-ADVENTURE OF ENDINGS FOR A SEMINAL ANIME SERIES.

BY PATRICK MACIAS

Illustration by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto

Hey, have you heard about this really cool anime show called *Evangelion*? They say it was a super-big hit in Japan in the mid-to-late Nineties. It had an ending that drove everyone who watched it crazy, but they still managed to milk two successful feature films from it.

Of course, I'm joking. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is one of those titles that seemingly everyone who associates themselves with anime and manga must know, even if only through its dauntless reputation as THE seminal anime series of the last decade.

Did I say decade?

Well, almost. In a scant 36 months, *Eva* will officially be 10 years old. Sort of hard to believe, isn't it? After all, is there any other anime that seems to be blessed with a state of perpetual freshness and rediscovery? For example, the LA Times recently ran a feature story on *Eva* that made it sound as if it had only just arrived here on planet Earth, which no doubt inspired a whole new wave of people to check it out as if it actually had. Maybe it is because the show's core cast is a bunch of adolescents prone to agonizing self-analysis. Or maybe it is because *Eva's* level of innovation was so high that even scads of imitators (who shall remain nameless) have failed to surpass it.

Whatever the magic bullet might be, *Evangelion* is still as popular as it was way back when it first hit, and if anything there's no sign of it

Neon Genesis Evangelion (TV series) © GAINAX/Project Eva • TV Tokyo © (movie) 1997 GAINAX/Project Eva (manga series) © GAINAX. Originally published in Japan by KADOKAWA SHOTEN PUBLISHING CO., LTD., Tokyo

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION

slowing down, despite the fact that (aside from the still-running *Evangelion* manga by Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, published in the U.S. by Viz Comics) there's been no new anime product proper since, oh, 1997.

But maybe with the recent release of ADV Films' *Neon Genesis Evangelion* DVD box set and Manga Video's imminent release of the two *Eva* theatrical films (*Death & Rebirth* and *The End of Evangelion*), a little more perspective is now finally possible:

But what is left standing once the dust settles? Your guess is as good as mine. In some ways, *Evangelion* is anime's great ink-blot test. Everyone seems to walk away from the 26-episode series with an entirely different set of impressions. In some ways how you deal with *Evangelion* reveals a lot about one's personality. Some find the show, especially the self-reflexive second half, to be artistically pretentious and indulgent. Others find *Evangelion*, with its allusions to the mystical Kabbalah and the Tree of Life, to be worthy of religious interpretation and devotion. Still many find themselves initially bonded to characters like Shinji, Asuka, and Rei only to feel betrayed and disappointed when the show fails to resolve all the conflicts and character arcs that it has set up.

With *Evangelion*, series writer and director Hideaki Anno decided to use anime not only as a means for self-expression but as a stream-of-consciousness trip into the great unknown. Since no one had attempted this feat before, *Evangelion* emerged as an unprecedented "one of a kind" production. This isn't to say that there were no market considerations that helped the show get made in the first place, or even helped to sustain its popularity (think about the nearly cynical use of "fan service" throughout). It's just that *Evangelion* begins as a story not entirely dissimilar from the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* and even *Mazinger Z*—a tale of absentee fathers, emotionally unstable sons, and giant robots that the fate of the world depends on—and it ends in a literal psychodrama that maybe the creator himself (if interviews are any indication) will never really understand.

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the first wave of the *Evangelion* craze was that a cult of personality quickly arose around creator Anno. From the countless magazine features and *Evangelion* critical studies books a sense emerged that if you really wanted to know what the heck *Evangelion* was supposed to be about, then you had to know what Anno kept in his refrigerator or at the very least get down on your knees and receive wisdom from an *Eva*-anointed high priest.

To be fair, *Eva* does seem to contain a host of personal symbols. It's said that the troubled relationship between Shinji and his distant manipulative father is based on Anno's own childhood. But the lasting success of *Evangelion* seems to indicate that by somehow trying to create a very personal work, Anno wound up tapping into something very universal.

Rarely does such an aggressively different narrative work become a popular hit. The British TV show *The Prisoner*, to which *Evangelion* is often compared, was only ever a cult hit. *Twin Peaks* was a big hit only for a short while and was abandoned by mass crowds by the time the spin-off movie *Fire Walk With Me* was released to empty theaters. By



新世紀エヴァンゲリオン

contrast, the *Evangelion* movies helped to save the film studio that released them (Toei) from utter financial ruin.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

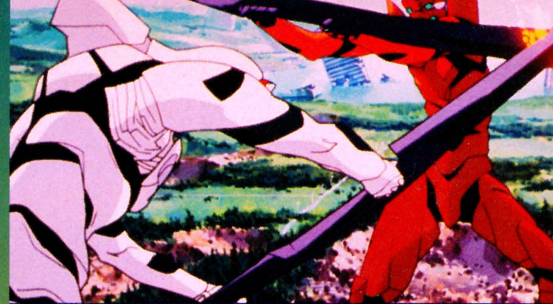
Many assume that the ending of the *Evangelion* TV series consists of limited animation simply because the time and money had finally run out. Going bananas was the only way to escape the artistic responsibility of having to deliver a "proper" ending. But look what happened when the *Evangelion* staff was given carte blanche to make an all-new feature film. The uncompromised and apocalyptic *End of Evangelion* might even be more disturbing and upsetting than the TV finale. Yet I still think it is a great film, perhaps even a masterpiece, simply because it puts the viewer in such an extraordinary state of mind—somewhere between totally confused and utterly transcendent. There really is nothing quite like *End of Evangelion* in the annals of film, animated or otherwise.

The other movie, *Evangelion: Death & Rebirth* is an entirely different matter. One would assume that this film, which reshuffles the events of the first 24 episodes of the TV series (along with some new animation) into a mind-bending blender, is meant to be just as experimental as *End* was. Certainly on the surface it looks to be the visual equivalent of a hardcore techno remix. But in fact, *Death* is nearly traditional in conception and execution.

The pair of *Evangelion* films, *Death & Rebirth* and *End*, are said to be based on the 1982 movie incarnations of the classic 1980-81 anime series *Densetsu Kyôjin Ideon*, a.k.a. *Space Runaway Ideon*, which was created by *Gundam* guru Yoshiyuki Tomino shortly after *Mobile Suit* left the airwaves. The first film, *Ideon: A Contact*, was simply a compilation of the 39-episode *Ideon* TV show. The second film, *Ideon: Be Invoked*, was, much like the *End of Evangelion*, comprised of entirely new animation that wrapped up the story in a unique fashion (meaning "totally bonkers").

Realistically, *Death & Rebirth* is meant to serve only one purpose: To get the audiences up to snuff on the storyline and characters before "the final chapter." But *Death & Rebirth* is a tricky thing, moving in two directions at once. On one hand, it follows the events of the show in a linear fashion. Meanwhile, it mixes in character events from the latter, more introspective, second half of the series. The result is much more than just a condensed tour of TV show highlights. From the very beginning, *Death & Rebirth* finds the emotional core of the characters who populate the *Evangelion* series and integrates it in a way the TV show perhaps never did. There's always been the sense that *Eva* was a show that started normal and got weirder as it went along—that the two halves never really managed to balance each other out. *Death & Rebirth* repairs that rift.

So now that all of *Evangelion* is finally available for consumption (or will be as of this September when *End* finally comes out on DVD), what now? Is it time to pack up and move on to new frontiers? Are we free at last from terminally passive boy-heroes, unknowable conspiracies, and freak-out finales? Well, one of the main themes, if not THE theme of the *Evangelion* series is evolution. To adapt is to survive, and *Eva* has certainly managed to do just that. It is quite possible that the next 10 years of the *Evangelion* phenomenon might just prove to be even more interesting than the first. ☆



THE TOTAL EXPERIENCE

Before immersing yourself into the head-scratching philosophy and complicated symbolism of the movies, you'll want to get in on the ground floor of the story with the TV series, and the best way to see the entire series is to get your hands on ADV Films' *Neon Genesis Evangelion* DVD boxed set, which contains all 26 episodes on eight DVDs (approx. US\$169.98). The boxed set also boasts improved image quality and restored footage over the initial VHS and DVD releases, without that pesky digital editing for text captions that was featured on early volumes of the series.

After repeated productions delays, the two films, *Evangelion: Death & Rebirth* and *The End of Evangelion*, are scheduled for release through Manga Entertainment this summer, with *Death & Rebirth* debuting on video in July and *End of Evangelion* set to hit the streets in September.

Meanwhile, the story of *Evangelion* continues in comic form, with character designer Yoshiyuki Sadamoto's own take on the story, which actually varies quite a bit from the animation. The current segment of the story, Book 7, is published in monthly comics by Viz, in both a Western-reading standard comic and an unreversed, true-to-the-Japanese "collector's edition." Both versions feature a character guide, series secrets and an informative letter column. ☆



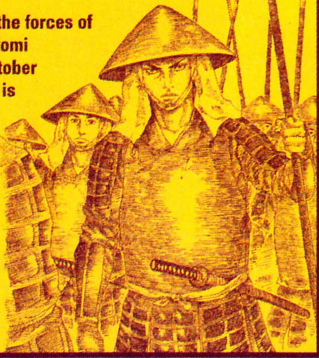
Vagabond

BY JUSTIN KOVALSKY



THE BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA

This critical battle between the forces of Tokugawa Ieyasu and Toyotomi Hideyoshi took place on 21 October 1600 in Mino Province in what is now Gifu Prefecture. In this battle, Ieyasu's forces of 80,000 defeated Hideyoshi's 130,000, setting the stage for Ieyasu's ascension to the status of Shogun three years later (a scenario not dissimilar to the St. Crispin's Day battle depicted in Shakespeare's *Henry V*).



In popular culture, martial arts, and academic circles, samurai are recognized as Japanese masters of the sword with a multilayered and

fascinating code of ethics. Feudal Japan, the cultural landscape of these renowned warriors, has been romanticized in fiction to no end over the centuries, with many historical figures at the forefront. Miyamoto Musashi, a sword master, fine artist, and author of the strategic classic, *The Book of Five Rings*, is one such figure. His skills in strategy were so far developed, he took up a wooden sword after his sixtieth kill, never to fight with a blade again...yet remaining undefeated for the duration of his life. Ever hear the adage "don't bring a knife to a gunfight?" Well this is what Musashi was doing, but he was defying the inherent logic and winning with the knife, so to speak. A renegade wanderer with an insatiable appetite for knowledge, Musashi became known among the Japanese as the great "sword saint."

Vagabond, a recent manga in release from Viz cComics, is yet another fictionalization of this central figure in Japanese historical lore. Based largely on the novel *Musashi* by Eiji Yoshikawa, this manga adaptation was created by Takehiko Inoue, famed creator of the vastly-popular-in-Japan basketball manga, *Slam Dunk*. *Slam Dunk* sold over 100 million copies the world over. How can a manga creator follow such a fast-break success? With the "sword saint," of course.

Although originally there was some skepticism among Japanese fans about whether Inoue—an artist at that time best known for a set-in-the-present sports manga—should even tackle historical samurai material, the results of his diligence far outshone those faint cries. In 2000, Inoue received the Media Arts award for manga from the Japanese Ministry of Culture as well as the coveted Kodansha award for best manga for *Vagabond*. Now, in America, manga readers are taking note. With its stunning visuals and vivid, expressive characters, not to mention the now *en vogue* right-to-left format, how could they not? Fans of *The Hakkenden*, *Ninja Scroll*, *Blade of the Immortal* and other sword dramas will surely be into this one, but the accolades heaped on *Vagabond* suggest a larger appeal that supersedes the samurai genre. It's not just a good samurai story, it's a good story. And based in fact, to boot.

THE MAKING OF A YOUNG SAMURAI

The story of *Vagabond* picks up directly following the Battle of Sekigahara, with two young men having survived the chaos—Takezo, who is actually the yet-to-be-named Miyamoto Musashi, and Matahachi. The 17-year-old warriors have set out together on a journey to make names for themselves on the battle field, and at first are met only with disappointment. They have seemingly escaped the battle of Sekigahara by fate alone, and to top it off, their side of the army lost. It's at this point that the boys are found by Akemi, a 15-year-old who makes her living by robbing the slain bodies of warriors on battlefields. Matahachi and Takezo are taken in by the young Akemi and her mother Oko. The chance for battle soon manifests, however, as a group of bandits attack the home where the two young warriors are recovering.




acter interaction here, in terms of the young women and their attraction to Takezo and the less charismatic and intense Matahachi), it's here that we are offered a glimpse of Takezo's relentless ferocity as a fighter and the wild nature of his character. Just get a glimpse of those eyes! It's clear from the beginning that despite his friend's company, Takezo is a solitary man with a somewhat sordid destiny of bloodshed, metamorphosis and enlightenment—the stuff of legend from above.

Inoue's art style maintains a hyper realism that is simultaneously dynamic and epic. The battles themselves can virtually be felt, as there is no small amount of gruesome violence from the get-go—faint of heart, beware. In one scene, Takezo stabs a soldier in the throat with a tree branch, then proceeds to elbow his face. It's a level of violence comparable to Hiroaki Samura's *Blade of the Immortal* (published in the U.S. through Dark Horse), although the based-on-a-true-story *Vagabond* lacks *Blade's* supernatural bent—to its credit. As a fictionalization of a war-torn Japan and the necessarily intense development of a man like Musashi, the conventional exaggerations prevalent in other manga are eschewed in *Vagabond*, lest they take away from the nature of the story. A scene in which Takezo is trapped inside a bathhouse by enemies is reminiscent of both an actual event and also a painting done by the Japanese artist Kuniyoshi in 1836 depicting the event. Other historical characters make appearances in the course of the story, such as the Zen monk Takuan Soho (1573-1645), a prevalent swordsman and author on the topics of Zen, swordsmanship and life. (His classic *Unfettered Mind* is worth a look for those interested in Zen philosophy.) It's said that upon his death, Soho painted the Chinese character for “dream” and calmly passed on, a commentary on the nature of transience. What would he think about appearing as a comic book character being read by an American audience in the year 2002?

As with most manga, *Vagabond* is largely a black-and-white comic, but several full-color, fully painted pages are strewn through the series that are so stunning so as to make you wish the entire book appeared as such. However, the finely detailed linework and wildly expressive faces of the characters should keep the pages turning easily. The very beauty of the book and the attractiveness of the characters have the potential of engrossing a wide audience (a female friend of mine who reads mostly American comics commented on the charisma of Musashi's character).

Vagabond is solid, straightforward stuff, with a grounding in history that is compelling instead of cumbersome. It's extremely light on comedy, and heavy on storytelling and above all else, character development. Couple this with its other aforementioned strengths, and America could have a runaway comic success with roots in Japanese history on its hands. ★



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KILL YOU
EVEN IF
YOU ARE
A MONK.

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HOW TO ENTER

Just pull your readers' response card out of the magazine, fill it out, fold it over, tape it shut, stick a stamp on it, and send it to us! You don't have to subscribe or anything—you're automatically entered to win!

CONTEST DEADLINE: 1 AUGUST 2002

THIS MONTH'S WINNERS!

Here are the winners from our
JOJO'S BIZARRE ADVENTURE CONTEST
from Vol. 10, No. 2:

Sergio Mejia • Bronx, NY
Eric Loesch • Virginia Beach, VA
Robert Thomas • Winston-Salem, NC
Mariko Burton • Tucson, AZ
Melanee Renee Elahee • Cincinnati, OH
Valerie Kapetanovic • Plain City, OH
Clint Ferrin • Hopewills, NC
Tiffanee Shaw • Forest Grove, OR
Sam Seavy • Lexington, KY

More winners next month!

CONTEST RULES

No purchase necessary. Employees of Viz Communications, Inc., Bandai Entertainment, and those associated with ANIMERICA magazine are ineligible to enter. Winners' names will be announced in the magazine. All prizes will be sent out following the winners' notification. Viz Communications is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Winners will be selected by random drawing by the staff of ANIMERICA. Good luck!



CREST OF THE STARS

BY EGAN LOO

Imagine your father is the president of your entire homeworld. Now, what if a massive space armada of genetically enhanced beings overwhelms the whole planet and broadcasts one request: Surrender. In a desperate act of self-preservation, your father does surrender the planet—if the conquering empire will install him as the planet's royal lord. Your people see your father as a sell-out for his own glory, and the empire sees him as a minor cogwheel in its grand machinations. That leaves you, a newly ordained noble for a nation that despises you and a figurehead for a regime that looks down on you. On top of things, you're transplanted off your world to become indoctrinated into the royal empire—to become an alien among aliens. Meanwhile, there's this war in the near future, pitting half of humanity against the other...

That is the premise of *Crest of the Stars* (*Seikai no Monshō*), a true epic saga at a time when words like "epic" and "saga" have lost their meaning through hype and overuse. When you hear the words "epic anime," you might think of such works as the "real robot" progenitor *Mobile Suit Gundam*, the apocalyptic angst of Clamp's *X/1999*, or the Hayao Miyazaki period drama *Princess Mononoke*. However, if you haven't heard of *Crest of the Stars*, you're missing out on a sweeping story that fulfills classic science fiction's promise of world-building.

Crest of the Stars is a universe with a millennia-long chronology, a few invented languages, its own system of measuring units, and an intricately devised particle and

multidimensional physics for faster-than-light travel. It is in every sense a space opera, a label that the creators themselves wear proudly. The story has shades of real-life history, like Europe's Hundred Years' War or the last emperor of China. Yet, it is also an elegant character study with sharp dialogue about a typical boy and a not-so-typical girl.

ALLIANCE IN THE HEAVENS

Eons after humans have reached out among the stars, mankind has fractured itself into several factions. Half of humanity has cobbled together a federation of superficially democratic nations that calls itself the Four Nations Alliance. The uncomfortable alliance's only reason for existence is the other half of humanity—the Abh Empire.

The Abhs are a self-selected nobility of genetically manipulated humans, with "normal" humans absorbed into their folds by conquest. The Abhs seek peace and stability through control of outer space. In fact, they would rather not directly subjugate each world and meddle in local affairs. Instead, they wish to dominate all interstellar travel so that no other group can rise above them.

Seven years earlier, the Abh space fleet forced the surrender of Jinto's world of Martine. Jinto has spent these years training to become an Abh noble despite his normal human genes. Not only has he not seen his family or homeworld the entire time, the 17-year-old has yet to even meet a "real" genetic Abh in person. A teenager of two worlds but belonging to neither,



All images for *Crest of the Stars*
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CREST OF THE STARS

he is the epitome of alienation.

This changes the day he embarks on the next step in his indoctrination: officer training at the Star Forces academy. He encounters his first Abh when he meets his escort, a haughty yet beautiful pilot trainee by the name of Lafiel. Thanks to their 200-year lifespan and constant genetic manipulation, Abhs are seemingly ageless and uncommonly striking with their blue hair and elfin ears.

Cultures clash from moment one. Lafiel's self-assuredness exposes Jinto's insecurities about his tenuous place in society. However, as a natural-born human, Jinto's very existence reminds Lafiel of her childhood fears about not being a "daughter of love." Jinto's naive earnestness and Lafiel's steely ferocity make for some of the best character-driven dialogue outside of Studio Ghibli works.

Jinto and Lafiel's patrol ship Gosroth becomes an expendable pawn in a dangerous chess match between the Four Nations Alliance and the Abh Empire. The two must struggle against the Alliance's forces as well as scheming betrayers on their own side to survive. The war escalates across star systems as factions switch allegiances as their conscience (or lack thereof) dictates. Jinto and Lafiel accept their respective heritages and strive to find common ground in a universe that alienates them both.

THE ORIGINAL NOVELS

Crest of the Stars is not the first novel epic to leap off the printed pages into anime—or even the first science fiction novel to do so. Studio Nue's Haruka Takachiho entertained readers with the space hijinks of the Dirty Pair before Sunrise animated the destructive duo. Novelist Yoshiki Tanaka has garnered worldwide popularity through the mythical *Heroic Legend of Arslan* and the monumental *Legend of Galactic Heroes*, as faithfully adapted by Artland. The space comedy anime *Irresponsible Captain Tylor* was loosely based on Hitoshi Yoshioka's *The Galaxy's Most Irresponsible Man* novels. Even Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* was animated by Sunrise a decade before Hollywood gave it the live-action treatment.

What makes *Crest of the Stars* and its sequels stand out is the sheer volume of background material by their author Hiroyuki Morioka. At the current count of 6 novels and 36 animated episodes (the 37th episode is a direct-to-video side story), the *Stars* story is far shorter than the 14 novels and 100-plus episodes that the *Legend of Galactic Heroes* boasts. However, even *Galactic Heroes* cannot claim to have the mind-numbing world-building notes that *Stars* has accumulated. The novel appendixes and supplemental guide books cover military hierarchy, units of measurement, language etymology, and more.

Like J.R.R. Tolkien did when creating his legend of Middle-Earth, Morioka even invented a few languages from scratch. While some exist only as vocabulary for the sake of narrative color, they also include the Abh language, the lingua franca of the Empire with its own pronunciation, grammar, and 28-character Abh alphabet. And yes, just like Klingon fanatics in *Star Trek*, fans have developed dictionaries, computer fonts, mailing lists (with or without Abh writing!), and even an online transliterator.

Part of the reason for the massive background is the long incubation the story had. Morioka had been penning short stories for five years while pitching his first full-length novel to publishers in vain. Finally, Hayakawa Books (the publisher of the Japanese edition of Arthur Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*) agreed to publish the first *Crest of the Stars* novel in 1996. The massive sales prompted two more follow-up volumes and then the *Battle Flag of the Stars* (*Seikai no Senki*) 3-novel sequel.

CREST OF THE STARS ANIME

Inevitably, the popular novels caught the eye of Sunrise and Bandai Visual, the anime studio and production company, respectively, behind *Mobile Suit Gundam*. It helped that Gainax anime and game creator Takami Akai (*Royal Space Force: The Wings of Honneamise*, *Princess Maker*) had drawn the striking covers for the novels. Many a Japanese fan has admitted to picking up the





novels after seeing the haunting cover portrait of Lafiel.

In short order, Sunrise animated *Crest of the Stars* as 13 episodes broadcasted in 1999. Keisuke Watabe (*Apocalypse Zero*) based his elegant character designs on Akai's novel cover art, while Yasuhiro Moriki (*Martian Successor Nadesico*, *Scryed*) led the team designing the intricate spaceships and mechanics.

The series attracted an audience eager for solid science fiction television, in spite of (or perhaps *because* of) the slow, measured pace of the story development and the emphasis on characters over action. (No one dies onscreen in the first four episodes, and the first real space battle doesn't occur until the series is one-third over.)

Mindful of the novel readers whose obsessiveness approaches that of Tolkien fans, Sunrise took some bold measures to stay faithful to the novels' spirit. Each episode begins with a prologue spoken entirely in Abh—with subtitles, fortunately. With the input of Morioka and science fiction setting consultant/scriptwriter Hiroaki Murakami, the meticulous world science is kept consistent and (for the most part) realistic. Bandai Entertainment has released the 13-episode *Crest of the Stars* animated series on four bilingual DVD volumes in North America. (Watch for subtle details in the near vacuum sequence of episode 8.)

BATTLE FLAG OF THE STARS ANIME

The success of the first series helped launch *Battle Flag of the Stars*, the 13-episode series based on the novel sequels to *Crest of the Stars*. The bigger episode budgets helped the animators at Asahi Production and Earthring to vastly revamp the stunning computer graphics, particularly during the battle sequences and multidimensional Plane Space travel.

Battle Flag of the Stars focuses on Jinto and Lafiel's exploits aboard the attack ship Basroil. Lafiel is now the captain, as self-assured as ever, but perhaps not quite so oblivious to other people's emotions. Jinto is her supplies officer, more assertive and mature. The war intensifies three years after the events chronicled in the *Crest of the Stars*, and the story dives into the intrigue and suspense between the warring factions and the individual planets.

BATTLE FLAG OF THE STARS II ANIME

The most recent anime foray was *Battle Flag of the Stars II*, the 10-episode closing to the *Battle Flag* story arc. Sunrise had no choice but to wait one year to end *Battle Flag* in anime; Morioka was still writing the last volume of the *Battle Flag* novels when the first *Battle Flag* anime series was still airing.

While Morioka hasn't released new novels in the *Stars* world after *Battle Flag*, he has continued to write short stories for books, manga, and even a PlayStation side story game. (Sunrise animated a side story video based upon "Birth," Morioka's short story about Lafiel's parents and her birth.) Naturally, in a universe as vast and intricate as the *Stars* world, there's always room for Morioka to spin more tales in the future.

In the meantime, Japanese fans have taken up the slack with original *dôjinshi* (fan-published) novels, reference books, manga, and even computer software. Twice a year, *Stars* fans gather (in costume and otherwise) at the Comic Market, the world's largest fan-publishing convention. They stake out a sizable section of the convention to sell *dôjinshi*, to talk plot points with each other, and even informally meet some of the animators like Watabe. The avid fan base for a novel series that's less than seven years old is a testament to what Hayakawa Books calls the "new generation of space opera."

If you require a quota of at least one death per episode in your anime, this series is not for you. For those who prefer the absorbing, satisfyingly complex kind of science fiction that anime is capable of creating, this is a worthy watch. ☆

Special thanks from the author to Christa Morse for being at the right place at the right time for the wrong motives at Comic Market Summer 2001.

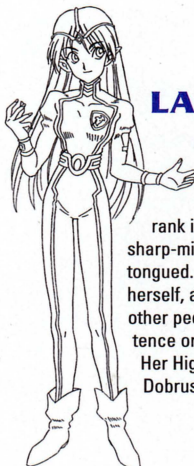
CREST OF THE STARS

CHARACTER SPOTLIGHT



JINTO

The human 17-year-old thrust into Abh nobility by his father's capitulation of his homeworld. After studying the ways of the empire for seven years, he is about to train as an officer of the Star Forces. He is earnest to a fault, and his resourcefulness makes up for his initial naivete. His full title is His Excellency, Prince Jinto of Lin Syun Rock Hyde.



LAFIEL

The 16-year-old Star Forces officer who happens to have a close royal connection to the Abh throne. Her rank is Pilot Trainee. She is as sharp-minded as she is sharp-tongued. She expects the best from herself, and is often impatient with other people's apparent incompetence or ignorance. Her full title is Her Highness, Viscount Abriel Nei Dobrusk Paryunu Lafiel.

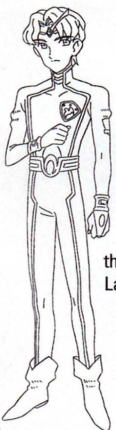
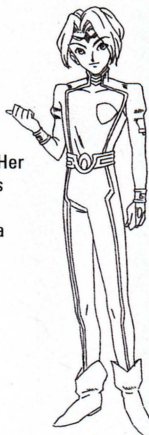
ROCK LIN

The president of Martine when it is surprised by a conquering fleet from the Abh Empire. He capitulates the planet and offers to become its magistrate under Abh rule. Fully aware of the ire that his actions would bring, he tries to save his family by providing them sanctuary.



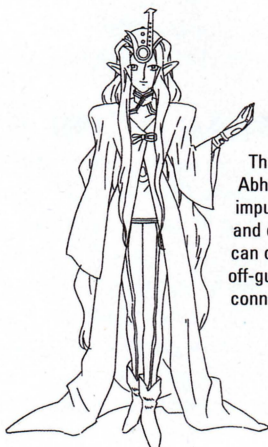
LEXSHUE

The charismatic Abh Star Forces captain of the patrol ship Gosroth. Her ship becomes the spark that ignites the war between the Four Nations Alliance and Abh Empire. She has a special connection with Lafiel.



FEBDASH

The baron of a remote frontier sector of the Abh Empire. He is a cocky, small-minded man who maintains an entourage of slavishly obedient vassals. Although he is a minor noble in the Empire, he plays an important role in Lafiel and Jinto's first journey together.



RAMAJ

The 27th empress of the Abh Empire. Although never impulsive, her far-sighted and calculated strategies can catch others completely off-guard. She has a royal connection to Lafiel.

TRIFE

The admiral heading the Abh fleet in the first battles with the Four Nations Alliance. He is meticulous in strategy and unrelenting in battle. His full title is Admiral Trife Bolj Yuvdale Remsale.



SPOOR

The delightfully capricious yet skillful Abh captain of the starship Futune. She has an almost impish attitude among her officers, but she performs where it counts on the battlefield. Her full title is Rear Admiral Spoor Aron Sekpado Letopanyu, Duchess of Peneju.



THE WORLD OF CREST OF THE STARS

ABH EMPIRE

The reich that rules over half of humanity. Its high command is composed of genetically enhanced beings evolved from humans. The rulers devote themselves to the absolute control of interstellar power and spacefaring ships. As such, they leave local administration to each planet and generally stay out of "Lander" affairs.

FOUR NATIONS ALLIANCE

A loose coalition of four regimes, united in their fear and distrust of the Abh Empire. The United Mankind, the Federation of Hania, the Republic of Greater Alcont, and the People's Sovereign Union of Planets signed the Nova Sicily treaty for mutual defense. While the four nations are democratic in theory, there are deep pockets of corruption that threaten to undermine peace in the known space.

MARTINE

Jinto's once-tranquil homeworld in the Hyde system. Jinto's father surrenders the entire planet over to the Abh Empire in face of overwhelming military force. Martine changes hands several times over the course of the story.

KEY ABH WORDS

ABH

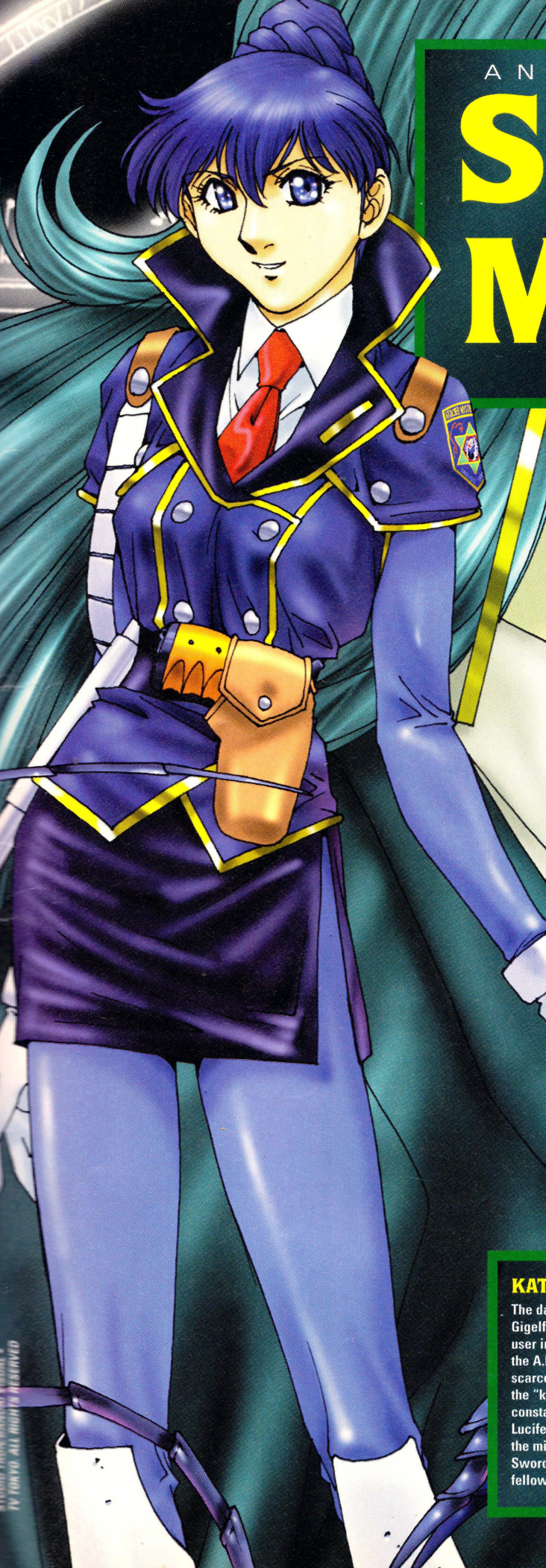
Genetically manipulated humans who are considered a separate species from Homo sapiens. Their telltale traits are blue hair, elfin ears, a forehead spatial sensory organ, and uncommon beauty. The reason for the Abh's existence is revealed during the *Crest of the Stars* series. The term "Abh" is also used to refer to the Abh Empire nobility, even for members who are genetically "normal" humans.

SORD/SAUDEC

The gates through which ships can slip from normal space (dadh) into Plane Space (fadh) for interstellar travel.

GEDREL/CÉDLAIRH

The distance in Plane Space that a fully-mobile space-time cluster containing 100 metric tons of matter can move in one second. This unit of measurement is needed because of how the laws of physics work in Plane Space. ☆



ANIMERICA SPOTLIGHT

SILENT MÖBIUS

BY MATT LOPEZ

Tokyo: AD 2024. A woman's scream emanates from a dingy Akihabara alleyway, interrupting above the din Tokyo's usual late-night traffic and crowds. The skies weren't kind to her tonight and, as she stands alone under the dim lights of the city's impossibly high skyscrapers, a pH 3.2 level acid rain soaks her to the core. But that's the least of her worries now; she's more concerned with the 12-foot tall creature in front of her. Is it a demon? Mutant? Perhaps a dreaded "Lucifer Hawk" she had heard about in urban legends?

Then, in a heartbeat, the alleyway is bathed in light as an energy blast from somewhere in the shadows knocks the creature off its balance, followed by a surge of wind and a furious heat that burns like a firestorm. Injured and caught off guard, the monster tries to stagger off the battlefield, but it doesn't make it more than 20 feet before an invisible barrier spits crackling energy into the night air creating a wall and cutting off any hope of escape. The creature turns around looking for another route only to be met by the receiving end of an ornate spear, slicing it clean in half. The battle is over, but the innocent woman will never forget what she saw in that alley. For her saviors however, it's all in a night's work when you're a member of the all-female Attacked Mystification Police

Department, also known as A.M.P.!

Yes, I know: I come off as more of a bad L. Ron Hubbard than a William Gibson with my feeble stab at pulp sci-fi writing. Still, despite being cheesy and melodramatic, I hope that I was able to drive home some of the energy and excitement that pulses through the cyberpunk world of the *Silent Möbius* television series. It would be easy at first to dismiss this series as another "girls with guns fight monsters" kind of show, but nothing could be further from the truth—this show has major story depth and genuinely impressive characterization for those willing to watch for the not-so-long haul (you can handle 26 episodes, right?). And hey, if you like the girls-with-guns thing too, there's plenty of that to go around too.

The story of *Silent Möbius* began its life as a manga created by industry superstar artist/writer Kia Asamiya, whose credits include (among others) *Dark Angel*, *Steam Detectives* and more recently, his own rendition of *Batman* for DC Comics. The *Silent Möbius* series ran for 8 years in the Japanese anthology *MONTHLY COMIC DRAGON*, finally totalling 12 compiled

KATSUMI LIQUEUR

The daughter of renowned wizard Gigelf Liqueur and a powerful magic user in her own right, Katsumi joins the A.M.P. early on. Though she scarcely understands it, Katsumi is the "key" to Nemesis and as such is constantly being hunted by the Lucifer Hawk. In battle she wields the mighty Grosopolinor, King of Swords and is fiercely loyal to her fellow team members.

SILENT MÖBIUS

volumes, and enjoyed a reasonable amount of success for its stylish, highly detailed art style and fresh spin on the sci-fi/horror genre. Fans of the comic series will be happy to know that the anime television series (in U.S. release through Bandai) follows relatively close to Asamiya's original storyline, only straying occasionally for dramatic purposes.

To some extent, the plot of the *Silent Möbius* television series revolves around the activities of the A.M.P. as they slog their way knee-deep through the dirtier parts of Tokyo hunting invading Lucifer Hawks, but more specifically, it's about the experiences of sorceress Katsumi Liqueur and her time inside and outside the ranks of the A.M.P. As the daughter of world-famous sorcerer Gigelf Liqueur (more on him later) Katsumi has a ton of baggage to carry concerning her father's reputation as well as her importance to the agents of Nemesis in fulfilling their plans.

UTOPIA LOST

Events in the first half of the 21st century have been harsh to Tokyo, and for that matter, the rest of the world. Air and ground pollution run rampant around the planet, making most land uninhabitable and constantly blanketing the surface in rain of the acid variety—the official “Rain of the Future,” you know. As a result, most of humanity is clustered into several “super-cities” (à la *Judge Dredd*) around the globe that have populations well into the hundreds of millions each; Tokyo and Hong Kong are two examples.

Aesthetically, the appearance of Tokyo is simultaneously technologically marvelous and frighteningly harsh. Basically, anything that is not a tree or person has been wrapped in glass and alloy, giving the city a cold, sanitized feel. A quick look skyward and one would see office and government buildings erected impossibly high into the air, and the ever present automated announcement balloons that drone throughout the city dispensing weather warnings crisscrossing between the crystal and steel towers. The hum and glow of thousands upon thousands of neon signs doesn't keep anyone up at night anymore—it's just part of the background noise in a city too large for anyone to really keep tabs on anymore.

Nope, the future didn't do away with crime as we all hoped it would and, if anything, it's only gotten worse. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department does its best to fight crime, but for various reasons, their effectiveness is limited. One of the reasons for their neutered responses is that the TMPD is no longer a government agency, but rather a private entity sponsored almost entirely by many of the larger corporations based in the city. It goes without saying that in a system like this, corruption is a daily fact of life and many times cases are dropped to cover up corporate misconduct throughout the city. Perhaps to cut costs or perhaps because they just don't give a rip, an entire section of Tokyo known as “Heaven's Hell” exists without any police protection at all.

Here, in what was once the shopping districts of downtown Tokyo, the *ko-gals* are more likely to knife you than let you take their picture, and the only people wearing loose socks are the homeless who can't afford the correct size. You live by your wits or you don't live at all.

Even more menacing than any criminal is



NAMI YAMIGUMO

Although she carries herself with the calmness and grace of a Shinto Priestess, when it's time to throw down, Nami can shred Lucifer Hawks with the best of them. As Heir to the House of Yamigumo, Nami carries the powerful Kirin Dagger into combat and can call upon any number of shamanic wards and spells to get the job done.



LUM CHENG

Hailing all the way from smoggy Hong Kong, Lum Cheng is a powerful sorceress in the same class as Katsumi, but doesn't join the A.M.P. until the second half of the series. Also like Katsumi, Lum Cheng wields a powerful magic weapon: Jesso, King of Blades.



LEBIA MAVERICK

As a member of the ultra-elite computer hackers group known as the "Visionaires," Lebia is the resident computer expert of the A.M.P. On top of her computer skills, Lebia also acts as a competent field commander, dispensing orders while the team is on a mission.

the presence of the Lucifer Hawks. A Lucifer Hawk is any variety of creatures hailing from the dimension opposite our own known as Nemesis. These creatures feed on humans like cattle and think little of life outside their home dimension. Their appearance is creepy to say the least, with misshapen bodies that are almost never symmetrical and always covered in sharp edges. Lucifer Hawks come in four varieties, each with different levels of intelligence and power, with type-one being the dumbest and weakest and type-four being the strongest and smartest. Type-one Lucifer Hawks are weak enough to be handled by the Mobile Police (think SWAT team), but the truly supernatural powers demonstrated by the other types call for the special services of the A.M.P.

THE GAIA PROJECT

Hope for a better Tokyo has faded over the years, but it wasn't always that way. Before the turn of the century, humans and Lucifer Hawks alike had been negotiating on a plan to exchange the dirty atmosphere of Earth for Nemesis' clean one by constructing a giant cyclotron that would open a gate between the two worlds. A joint team of scientists and members of the mysterious Magicians Guild undertook this task. Though their cause was just and their hearts in the right place. The same could not be said for the inhabitants of Nemesis and their minions.

One of the main proponents of the Gaia Project, as it would come to be known, was renowned Earth sorcerer Gigelf Liqueur. Gigelf was an immensely powerful magic-user and had great visions for the future, but upon activation of the cyclotron his hopes were dashed when his former assistant, Ganossa Maximillian, betrayed him and all humanity by opening the gate wider than intended thus causing the "Silent Crisis" that ravaged the planet. In the following years, Lucifer Hawks killed many members of the Magicians Guild, Gigelf included, as they fought to contain them. Things had been quiet for a while, but twenty years later the Lucifer Hawks are getting rowdy again.

HIGH-HEELS, A BADGE, AND A GUN

The A.M.P. department was formed in the early 2020s by Rally Cheyenne to contain the Lucifer Hawk threat in Tokyo. To these ends the department is given an incredible amount of resources and authority by the controlling corporations. When the series begins, there are five team members besides Rally: Commander Mana

THE MOVIES

Two feature films based on *Silent Möbius* were also produced in 1991 and 1992, but only the first movie was ever released in the U.S. through Streamline Pictures and is now out of print. Grab a VHS copy if you can find it—the film's high production values more than make up for the confusing story which assumes that you already have extensive grounding in the series' background from reading the manga.

THE MANGA

Kia Asamiya's original *Silent Möbius* manga has been published off and on by Viz Comics since 1993. As one of the company's earliest experiments in releasing manga to the U.S., *Silent Möbius* was first released as a color comic, with the original black-and-white artwork "enhanced" by painted color. In the 1999, the series was reissued in its original black-and-white format with a new, updated translation. The current run of the series, *Silent Möbius: Blood* (starting in July 2002) is from Japanese Volume 10 of the series.

SILENT MÖBIUS

Isozaki; computer adept Lebia Maverick; cyborg Kiddy Phenil; priestess Nami Yamigumo; and psychic Yuki Saiko. Sorceress Katsumi Liqueur joins early in the series, and Lum Cheng, a sorceress from China, comes onto the scene towards the middle, bringing the team total up to eight. Working together, these ladies kick some serious Lucifer Hawk butt.

Remember, though, that the A.M.P. is part of the police force as well, and in times of peace is subject to the many of the same grueling, anxiety-riddled duties as normal officers. To these ladies, free time is a resource that is sometimes more precious than the air they breathe. In one episode, A.M.P. officers Katsumi and Lum Cheng even call in a fake Lucifer Hawk attack just to sneak off to a resort outside the city!

As the ladies of A.M.P. battle the invaders, the storyline of *Silent Möbius* weaves in and out of the personal lives of each member, giving them all a great amount of personality that jumps off the screen. Plot twists are abundant as the secret, often traumatic pasts of each member are revealed and layered onto the overall story. Over time, the women become more potent fighters together than when apart and function like a family when off duty—a family that slays demonic creatures that is.

With the release of *Silent Möbius* on DVD from Bandai this summer there's no better time to get into this series. If monster-busting in a futuristic, *Blade Runner*-esque cityscape and action of seriously Earth-shattering proportions is your cup of tea, you certainly won't want to miss *Silent Möbius*. ☆

KIDDY PHENIL

Years before she joined the A.M.P., Kiddy was mortally injured by a homicidal megadyne (cyborg) known as Wire. To save her own life she had to shed her flesh and bone body in favor of a megadyne body, thus becoming the thing she hates. As a member of the A.M.P. Kiddy's super strength and agility is valuable for firing huge weapons and punching holes in Lucifer Hawks.

CHARACTER SPOTLIGHT

ROSA CHEYENNE

Rally Cheyenne's sister and also of the same mixed human/Lucifer Hawk heritage. Rosa has forsaken mankind because of the way humans treated her as a child and now assists Ganossa and Nemesis with their plans.



RALPH BOMAS

A police detective and friend of Robert DeVice, Ralph initially does not get along with the members of the A.M.P. due to their preferential treatment—especially Kiddy. Through various events though, Ralph warms up to the team, eventually becoming Kiddy's boyfriend.



ROBERT DEVICE

Katsumi's loving boyfriend and a superbly competent police officer, Robert is the anchor that keeps Katsumi in Tokyo and fighting as a member of the A.M.P. As an officer, Robert does what he can to fight corruption in the system and keep the public image of police high.



RALLY CHEYENNE

A mysterious woman who is the product of cross-breeding between a human woman and a Lucifer Hawk, Rally founded the A.M.P. to fight the threat she knew would be coming back. Rally shares many of the same supernatural powers of the Lucifer Hawk, but does not share their malice towards human life—the same cannot be said about her sister, Rosa.



MANA ISOZAKI

Mana is second in command of the A.M.P. and handles most of the day-to-day operations while Rally acts as liaison to the corporate brass. Though rarely called on to fight, Mana's magic ability is considerable.



GANOSSA MAXIMILLIAN

Perhaps the most evil human on the face of the planet, Ganossa sold his soul to Nemesis in his lust for power. As a former assistant to Gigelf Liqueur, Ganossa betrayed humanity by sabotaging the cyclotron thus causing the current Lucifer Hawk invasion. His work however is not complete and he continues to assist Nemesis in the conquest of Earth. ☆



YUKI SAIKO

Yuki is the only member of the A.M.P. who relies on psychic rather than magical abilities to combat the Lucifer Hawk and is the product of a secret corporate project to create living weapons. Yuki has largely shed the offensive aspects of her training in favor of the defensive and precognitive ones.



A contemplation of the sensual appeal of anime characters

Mima, *Perfect Blue*

What is sexy? How is it defined? And how can you apply the word "sexy" to a bunch of made-up characters?

Easy. Art, like language, is what humans use to communicate with each other. In the drawings created by animators and manga artists, we see an idealized reality filled with wonder and beauty...and yes, sensuality. If anime and manga characters are heroes and icons, doesn't it also make sense that they'd be sexy too? And with so many artists working in the field, is it really such a surprise that the art of creating sexy characters has been refined to such a high art?

A GUIDE TO

Sexy Anime Archetypes

BY MARK SIMMONS

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then we can hardly expect to find a single standard of sex appeal which will unite all anime fans in slavish worship of a single, ultimately gorgeous character. However, thanks to the magic of genre conventions, it's possible to identify a few recurring styles of sexy characters. From ice maidens to burning hunks, there are charismatic characters to suit every taste.

Male Archetypes

The Manly Man

Rarer than you'd think, this type is the pinnacle of macho perfection. Tall, well-muscled, and favoring deeds over words, he strides through a world of cowering losers with unswerving confidence and conviction. Strong and silent heroes like *Fist of the North Star*'s Kenshiro and *Gatchaman/Battle of the Planet*'s Condor Joe are hewn from this manly cloth, as are rugged villains like *Fatal Fury*'s Geese Howard, and morally ambiguous types like Crying Freeman that populate the manga works of Ryoichi Ikegami. *Blade of the Immortal*'s Mifune-esque swordsman Manji and *Battle Angel Alita*'s Figure Four represent a variant of this category, whose wry, ironic sense of humor doesn't change their essentially grim and determined nature.

The American

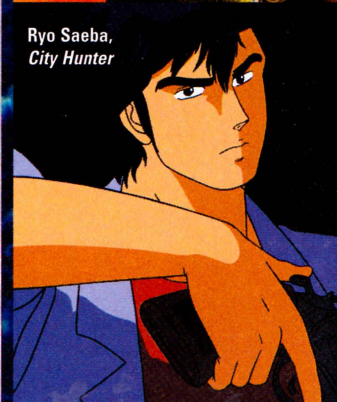
While the American is handsome and self-possessed, one thing separates him from The Manly Man: his mouth. Characters of this type are brash, informal, and friendly; more to the point, they won't shut up. While their extroverted nature makes them a hit with the ladies, these fellows tend to get killed off once they've fulfilled their narrative purpose of inspiring the sullen heroes. Note that these characters aren't necessarily Americans—they just act like it. Examples include *City Hunter*'s Ryo Saeba, *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s Sleggar Law, *Robotech/Macross*'s Roy Fokker, and *Evangelion*'s Kaji.

Burning Sense of Justice

Hot-blooded heroes are the mainstay of anime, and The Burning Sense of Justice boy—and he's more often a boy rather than a full-grown man—is not always a particularly good-looking character, but his life force shines so brightly it's impossible not to be entranced by his youthful energy, devotion to duty, and boundless supply of fighting spirit. *Dragon Ball Z*'s Son Goku, *Yu Yu Hakusho*'s Yusuke, *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s Amuro Ray all typify this sort of hero; it's worth noting that this character is usually of Japanese origin, such as *Street Fighter II*'s Ryu.



"White Haired Demon," Wounded Man



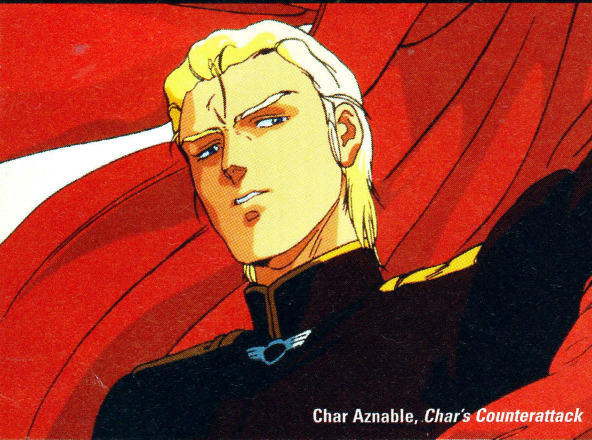
Ryo Saeba, City Hunter



Yu Ommae, Spriggan



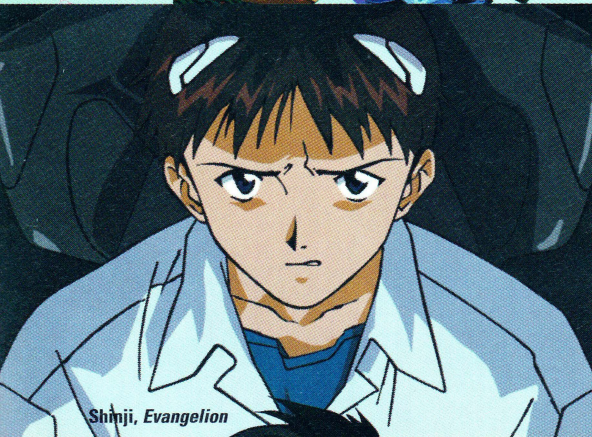
D, *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*



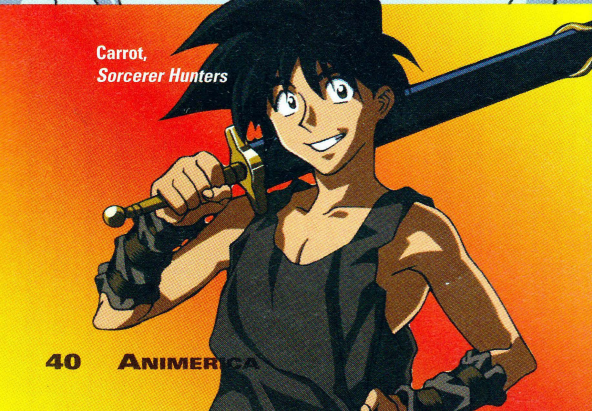
Char Aznable, *Char's Counterattack*



Nuriko,
Fushigi Yûgi



Shinji, *Evangelion*



Carrot,
Sorcerer Hunters

Sex Cels

Mister Dark and Tormented

In real life, these guys would be a real drag to be around, but in a dramatic context their emotional and physical scars become erotically compelling. It can be hard to distinguish the genuine brooding heroes from those who simply don't communicate very well; *Sailor Moon*'s Tuxedo Mask, for example, has enough tragedy in his past to justify a permanent cloud of angst, but it also makes it hard for him to hold up his end of a relationship. The most genuinely tormented brooders, like Captain Harlock and Vampire Hunter D, are more often tortured loners who wear their scars on the outside as well.

The Enigma

Not everyone with a mysterious past is tormented, nor are all of them tall and dark. Like Mister Dark and Tormented, The Enigma may have tragedy lurking in his closet, or just a secret identity. He may be a masked hero, or lead a double life. He could be passive on the surface, yet seething with passion underneath. You just don't know what he's thinking half the time, but it's something makes you desperately want to find out. *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s Char Aznable is perhaps the archetype of The Enigma; *Dragon Ball Z*'s Trunks hails from a mysterious past/future; *Star Blazers*' Leader Desslok has an intriguing fey dimension (an addition to the character as opposed to the all-macho Japanese rendition).

Don't Hate Me Because I'm Beautiful

Where would anime be without gender-bending beauty? These characters are usually pretty easy to spot, what with their flowing locks and dreamy eyes; from the warriors of *Fushigi Yûgi* to *Goshogun*'s Bundle to the proprietor of the Petshop of Horrors, their so-lovely-they're-almost-feminine nature is obvious from the first glance. However, looks aren't everything—ladylike loveliness doesn't preclude them from being butch. To confuse the issue even more, even butch-looking characters can earn androgyny stripes through voice and mannerisms; *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s M'Quve, for example, has a decadent charisma that belies his ugly exterior.

The Young and Clueless

Confused, adolescent, lost in puberty, The Young and Clueless is searching for meaning. Both his positive and negative points come from his own ignorance of what to do in a romantic situation. Oftentimes, he's surrounded with girls who want him bad, and yet, he's too paralyzed by his own inexperience to make up his mind. Clueless characters who actually manage to make it through puberty eventually graduate into enlightened carnal knowledge, but until then, innocents such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*'s Shinji, *Tenchi Muyo!*'s Tenchi, *Martian Successor Nadesico*'s Akito, and *Ranma 1/2*'s Ranma are near irresistible lures to hosts of obsessive suitors.

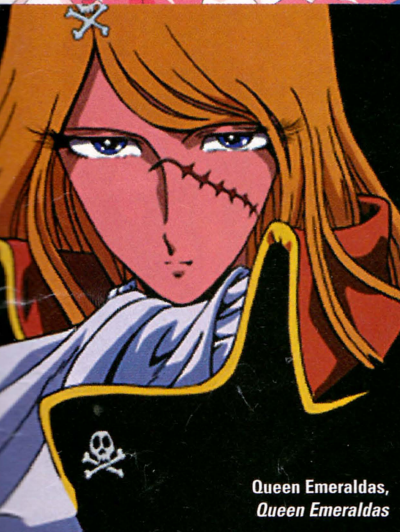
The Hormone Kid

No wimpy teenager with a paralyzing terror of the opposite sex, The Hormone Kid is a hero who actually *wants* to get with the ladies; as an extra bonus, these characters invariably turn out to have a sweet romantic streak that manifests itself as soon as they get lucky. Golden Boy and Junk Boy are obvious case studies, but so are Carrot of *Sorcerer Hunters* and the sympathetic hero of the adult video *End of Summer*. However, this isn't a style that ages well. Grown-up Hormone Kids (like City Hunter and Lupin III), even if they have other redeeming qualities, are more or less just considered perverts, and are usually treated appropriately by the opposite sex, with 1000-pound hammers and stinging slaps.

Female Archetypes



Mima with
CHAM,
Perfect Blue



Queen Emeraldas,
Queen Emeraldas



Madoka,
Orange Road



Saya, Blood:
The Last Vampire

The Pistol-Packing Mama

The legacy of Pam Grier lives on in the tough chicks of anime. While there are a variety of anime babes who can hold their own in hand-to-hand combat, there's something perversely compelling about the ones who can handle firearms—perhaps because they're intruding on what's traditionally male territory. *Cowboy Bebop*'s Faye Valentine, *G Gundam*'s Rain Mikamura and *Lupin III*'s cunning moll Fujiko, for example, not to mention the Dirty Pair, are buxom ladies who never find themselves fumbling with a safety catch.

The Lady

Just as high-cheekboned supermodels occupy the highest tier of real-world fashion, anime's most striking women are the unattainable divas whose sheer classiness leaves the menfolk speechless with awe. The Lady is something of a Leiji Matsumoto specialty, with Queen Emeraldas perhaps the most impressive of the lot. However, it's not enough to be merely high-class; *Fist of the North Star*'s feckless martyr Julia pales by comparison to *Nausicaä*'s feisty, foxy Princess Kushana.

The Idol

Who wouldn't be fascinated by a girl in the spotlight? From *Robotech/Macross*' Minmay to the teen heri-one of *Fancy Lala*, the singing star is a staple of anime. Through music, she reveals her inner feelings, and sometimes even saves the world. But as *Macross Plus*' Sharon Apple, *Key the Metal Idol*'s Miho and *Perfect Blue*'s Mima show, living in the lime-light also has a darker side, and the problem with idols is the pedestal they're put on—it's a pretty long way to fall.

Call Me Queen

The catchphrase of the anime dominatrix, "Call Me Queen" applies to those whip-wielding wenches who cast subtlety aside and go straight for the black leather. There's not really much more that need be said about *Sorcerer Hunter*'s transforming Misu sisters, Sophia from *Toshinden*, or Desty Nova's kinky minion in *Battle Angel Alita*. If this is your type, you know it.

The Feral Girl

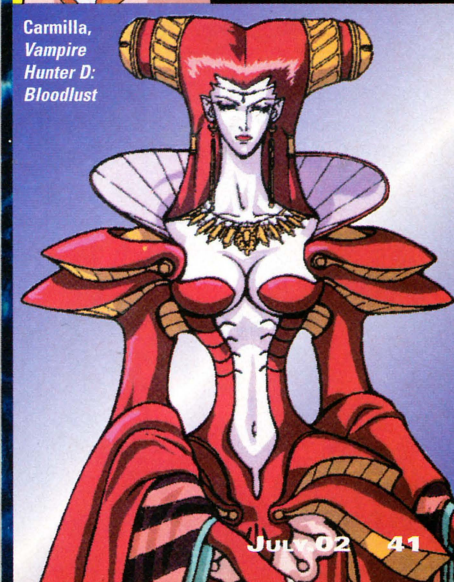
While a lot of anime girls are timid and non-threatening, there's a distinct strain of young women who are outright dangerous. Whether bored and psychotic like that bad girl from *Mezzo Forte*, an inhuman slayer of supernatural beasts like Saya, the heroine of *Blood*, or simply raised by wolves as in Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke*, the Feral Girl is simultaneously terrifying and incredibly hot...in both cases, because there's absolutely no telling what she might do. Perhaps no-one's lived to tell the tale.



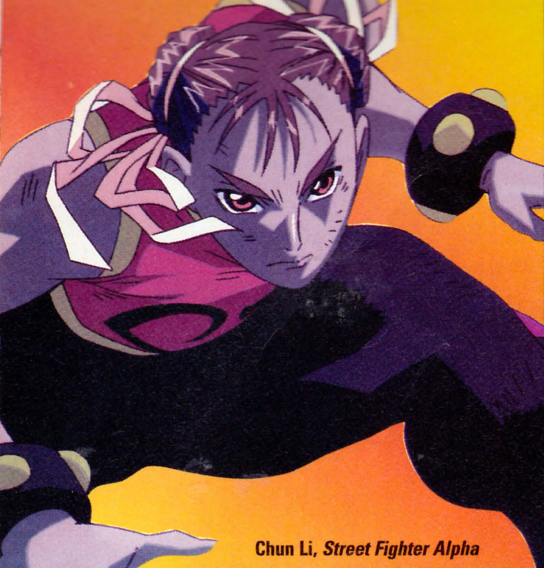
Faye Valentine,
Cowboy Bebop



Tira Misu and Chocolate Misu,
Sorcerer Hunters



Carmilla,
Vampire
Hunter D:
Bloodlust



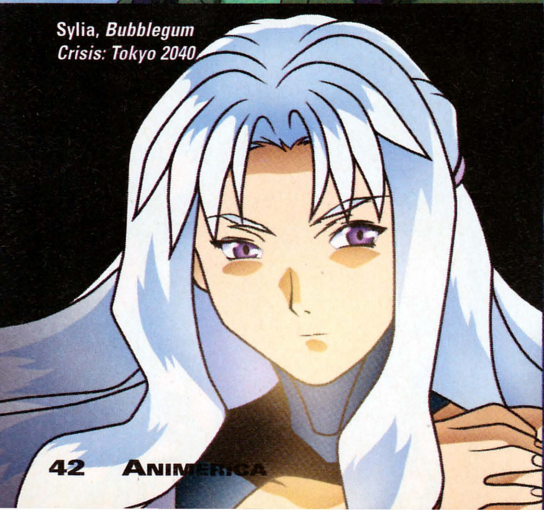
Chun Li, *Street Fighter Alpha*



Yurika, *Martian Successor Nadesico*



Ayeka,
Tenchi Forever



Sylia, *Bubblegum
Crisis: Tokyo 2040*

Sex Cels

Action Girl

Like the male version, the Burning Sense of Justice boy, the Action Girl lives for the fight, the challenge. She won't take no for an answer, won't tolerate rule-breaking—not in her town!—and will never settle for one iota less than her absolute heart's desire. If she's not the heroine herself, such as Cutey Honey or Nadia, she'll be the girl that all boys in their rights minds are after, such as *Ranma 1/2*'s Akane. It's a foregone conclusion that she'll be more than a match for her mate, and won't hesitate to lower the boom when necessary, as demonstrated by *Dragon Ball Z*'s Bulma. Darker versions of the Action Girl include the android Armitage III, and *Kite*'s pistol-packing young assassin Sawa.

The Girl Next Door

Like the name implies, the Girl Next Door is often just that—the sweet, ordinary girl that goes to school—or to her everyday job on an intergalactic space vessel—just like everyone else. Her notable characteristics are her very normalcy, from clothes to pastimes; the Girl Next Door ultimately wants nothing more than to live out her future with her own personal True Love. Examples in anime abound, no matter the setting, from *Star Blazers*' Nova to *Martian Successor Nadesico*'s Yurika to *Escaflowne*'s Hitomi.

Teach Me About Love

An otherworldly version of The Girl Next Door, the Teach Me About Love girl is of alien or supernatural origin, and covets human life and emotional attachments, usually in the form of a young man with whom she wants to build a new, perfect romantic life. She could be an actual alien, such as *Urusei Yatsura*'s Lum or *Tenchi Muyo!*'s Ayeka, or she could come from other places altogether such as videotapes (*Video Girl Ai*) heaven (*Oh My Goddess!*) or be of mixed ancestry, such as Filia from *Slayers Try*.

The Enigma

Like the male Enigma, the female version is a mystery, but she often has more range than her male counterpart. Rather than a worldly heroine, she is more often a blank slate, young and unformed, a canvas on which admirers long to write. Would the love of the right person bring her out of her shell? *Kimagure Orange Road*'s Madoka and *Evangeliion*'s Rei are both youthful examples; grown up, the distaff Enigma can mirror the male model by becoming stoic action hero, such as *Ghost in the Shell*'s Motoko Kusanagi or *Bubblegum Crisis*' Sylia, or go the route of femme fatale or even outright villain, such as *Record of Lodoss War*'s Dark Elf Pirottesse. The *Revolutionary Girl Utena* series overflows with Enigma characters, both male and female.

Annapuma and Yumipuma, *Dominion*



TOP TEN SEXIEST MANGA ARTISTS

Masamune Shirow (*Appleseed*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Dominion*, *Orion*)
Masakazu Katsura (*Video Girl Ai*, *Shadow Lady*)
Hiroyuki Utagane (*Seraphic Feather*)
Naoki Yamamoto (*Dance Till Tomorrow*)
Ryoichi Ikegami (*Crying Freeman*, *Sanctuary*, *Offered*, *Wounded Man*)
Kosuke Fujishima (*Oh My Goddess!*, *You're Under Arrest!*)
Kia Asamiya (*Silent Möbius*, *Dark Angel*, *Nadesico*)
Kazushi Hagiwara (*Bastard!!*)
Kenichi Sonoda (*Gunsmith Cats*, *Exaxxon*)
Hiroaki Samura (*Blade of the Immortal*)

TOP TEN SEXIEST ANIME CHARACTER DESIGNERS

Yoshiaki Kawajiri (*Ninja Scroll*, *Wicked City*, *Demon City Shinjuku*)
Yasuomi Umetsu (*Gatchaman*, *Kite*, *Mezzo Forte*)
Toshihiro Kawamoto (*Cowboy Bebop*, *Gundam 0083*, *Golden Boy*)
Shuko Mursase (*Gundam Wing*, *Street Fighter II: The Movie*, *Street Fighter II V*)
Masami Obari (*Fatal Fury*, *Voltage Fighter Gowcaizer*, *Virus*)
Yoshitaka Amano (*Vampire Hunter D*)
Nobuteru Yuki (*Escaflowne*, *X the Movie*, *Record of Lodoss War*)
Hirotoshi Sano (*Nazca*)
Keiji Goto (*Sorcerer Hunters*, *Those Who Hunt Elves*, *Gate Keepers*)
Akemi Takada (*Kimagure Orange Road*, *Fancy Lala*, *Patlabor*)



Makie,
Wicked City



Knight Hunters: Weiss Kreuz

Party at the Playboy (or Girl) Mansion

Suppose you're not looking for a lasting relationship to an anime *amour*, but a fleeting infatuation, a simple night of people-watching pleasure? There are plenty of productions meant to cater to both girl-watchers and guy-watchers alike.

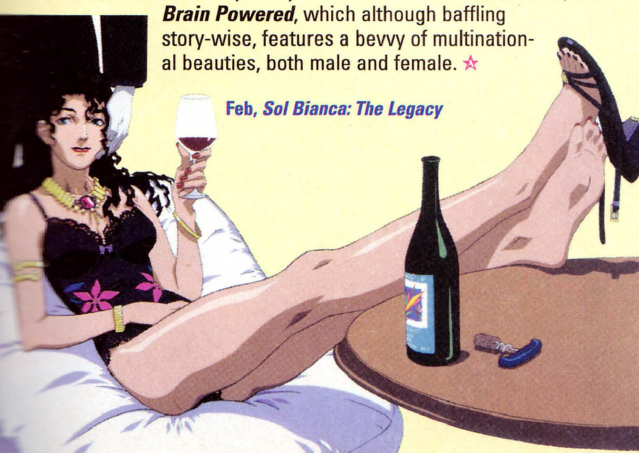
For those who like seeing large quantities of shapely misses strut their stuff, *Megami Paradise* features a kingdom of women not unlike Wonder Woman's Paradise Island, where multitudes of maidens wander around in wispy garments and oh-so-tiny skirts. The girls of *Agent Aika* are their spiritual high-tech sisters, flaunting their abundant charms and flashing their underwear against a super-science backdrop. For more sci-fi-flavored eye candy, *Moldiver's* henchwomen, the Machine Gals, are all based on actual actresses and supermodels, featuring names like Brooke and Natasha—look closely at their character designs and see if you can spot the real-world counterparts they're taken from.

In a slightly more down-to-Earth mode, *Golden Boy* literally overflows with hot chicks, as the title character drifts from one ladies-laden job to another. And anime titles from *Oh My Goddess!* to *Love Hina* to *Tenchi Muyo!* present a reality where an unassuming-looking residence is the stomping ground of lovely ladies both exotic and domestic.

The obsessive parade of suitors marching through the Tendo Dojo in *Ranma 1/2* sets of another type of anime fashion show—where the main character draws the attention of nearly every attractive person he/she meets. In the case of Ranma, who is both a boy and a girl, that's a pretty large crew, all of which then attract their own complicated romances aside from their own obsession with Ranma.

For productions that appeal to both sexes across the board, there's *The Movie*, in which nearly every character is a toothsome treat, and *Brain Powered*, which although baffling story-wise, features a bevy of multinational beauties, both male and female. ★

Feb, Sol Bianca: *The Legacy*



Team Players

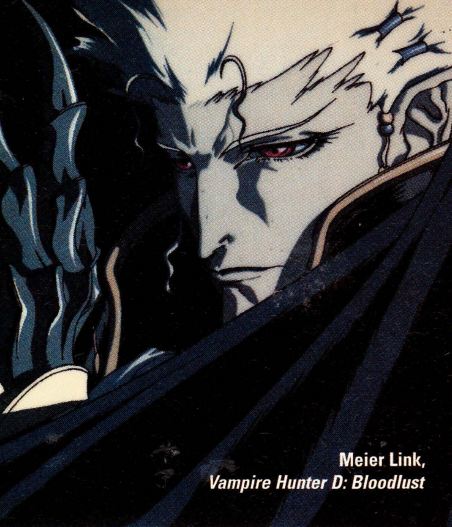
Sexy characters don't always come alone. They often come in pairs. "Lovely Angels" Kei and Yuri, better known as The Dirty Pair are only the most obvious example. There's also Annapuma and Yumi puma (*Dominion: Tank Police*); their fantasy cat-girl counterparts in *Escaflowne*; *Hyper Dolls'* Mew & Mica; the two-girl combo of Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune (*Sailor Moon*), not to mention the rest of the Sailors; the detective partners of *Fake*; and numerous brother-and-sister teams (frequently evil) from videogame inspired works such as *Voltage Fighter Gowkaiser*.

Teams are also prevalent. Consider, if you will, the Beatles/boy band model—the cute one, the sensitive one, the shy one, the ambiguously-oriented one...you get the idea. While some anime titles focusing on a group theme have an obvious designated Sexy Character (e.g. Nagha in *Slayers*) or a Greek chorus of more or less similar cuties (your classic "bridge bunnies" who function as a harem under the Viagra-infused supervision of a grizzled commander, as in *Macross/Robotech*, *Nadesico*, *Evangeline*, *Irresponsible Captain Tylor*, *Vandread*, etc., etc.), many ensemble shows give you a choice of co-starring archetypes, the better to suit everyone's tastes. This dynamic is based in part on the classic live-action *sentai* (hero-team) team model, such as the Power Rangers, where the character archetypes are actually color-coded to give you an idea of their personalities and role in the team itself.

Examples include series with actual teams such as *Bubblegum Crisis* (one rock star, one enigmatic madame-of-mystery, one bubbly pipsqueak, one Plain Jane), the armored heroes of *Ronin Warriors/Samurai Troopers* (whose differing personalities evoke Confucian virtues), the crime-fighting Knight Hunters from *Weiss Kreuz*, or the Ghost Fighters of *Yu Yu Hakusho*. The costumed heroes of *Gatchaman* (the Yasuomi Umetzu remake version, to be sure) feature a stud-muffin hero, a scowling *Lethal Weapon* type who lives in a trailer, a jolly fat guy, a skateboarding kid and a sexy miss. The flaxen-haired fighters of *Fushigi Yûgi* and *Sailor Moon* follow a similar personality model (the leader, the rebel, the gentle one, the loud-mouth, etc.) Some groups, such as the G-Boys of *Gundam Wing* don't even work together, but their character types (one bad-ass, one hard-ass, one smart-ass, the gentle one, the mysterious one, *et cetera*) follow the team dynamic nonetheless. ★

Kei and Yuri, *Dirty Pair Flash*





Meier Link,
Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust



Ashram,
Record of Lodoss War



Taki,
Wicked City



Dark Schneider,
Bastard!!



Onizuka
GT

Sex Cels

Hot Stuff

A countdown of the top 100 hottest characters in anime and manga. Compiled by Julie Davis and Mark Simmons with help from Kelli Blackwell, Urian Brown, Kit Fox, Matt Lopez, James Teal and Benjamin Wright

The Men

Vampire Hunter D
(*Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*)
Vegeta (*Dragon Ball Z*)
Leader Desslok/Desslar (*Star Blazers/Space Battleship Yamato*)
Dark Schneider (*Bastard!!*)
Trunks (*Dragon Ball Z*)
Roy Fokker (*Robotech/Macross*)
Dilandau Albatou (*Escaflowne**)
Condor Joe (*Gatchaman*)
Hotohori (*Fushigi Yûgi*)
Geese Howard (*Fatal Fury*)
Kaji (*Evangelion*)
Fuma (*X the Movie*)
Yu Onimae (*Spriggn*)
Ryoma Nagare
(*Getter Robo: Armageddon*)
Roger Smith (*The Big O*)
Captain Harlock (*Arcadia of My Youth, Galaxy Express 999*)
Spike Spiegel (*Cowboy Bebop*)
Freeman (*Crying Freeman*)
Meier Link (*Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*)
Heero Yuy (*Gundam Wing*)
Tamahome (*Fushigi Yûgi*)
Ashram (*Record of Lodoss War*)
Kenshin (*Rurouni Kenshin*)
Mamoru (*Blue Seed*)
Kamui (*X the Movie*)
Allen Schezar (*Escaflowne*)
Char Aznable (*Mobile Suit Gundam, Char's Counterattack*)
Treize Khushrenada (*Gundam Wing*)
Inu-Yasha (*Inu-Yasha*)
Chang Wufei (*Gundam Wing*)
Ryoga (*Ranma 1/2*)
Tasuki (*Fushigi Yûgi*)

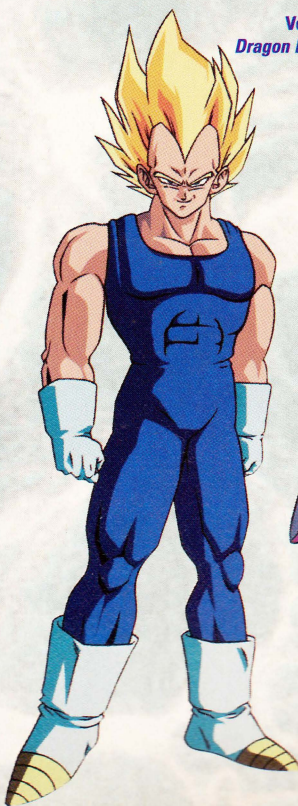
Carrot (*Sorcerer Hunters*)
Kaworu (*Evangelion*)
Chief Chujo (*Giant Robo*)
Aburatsubo Ayanajojo
(*Magic's User's Club*)
Seiji (*Ronin Warriors/Samurai Troopers*)
Duke Togo (*Golgo 13*)
Guts (*Berserk*)
Captain Goto (*Patlabor*)
Kiley (*Peach Girl*)
Genya (*Giant Robo*)
Terry Bogard (*Fatal Fury*)
Ryo Saeba (*City Hunter*)
Rei (*Fist of the North Star*)
Tokai (*Sanctuary*)
Tuxedo Mask (*Sailor Moon*)
Duo Maxwell (*Gundam Wing*)
Folken Lakur de Fanel (*Escaflowne*)
Ashitaka (*Princess Mononoke*)
Derek Wildstar (*Star Blazers*)
Toya (*Ceres: Celestial Legend*)
Van Slanzar de Fanel (*Escaflowne*)
Legato Bluesummers (*Trigun*)
Cobra (*Space Adventure Cobra*)
Son Goku (*Dragon Ball Z*)
Zechs Merquise (*Gundam Wing*)
Sesshō-Maru (*Inu-Yasha*)
Manji (*Blade of the Immortal*)
Ryu (*Street Fighter II*)
Taki (*Wicked City*)
Trowa Barton (*Gundam Wing*)
Vash the Stampede (*Trigun*)
Andy Bogard (*Fatal Fury*)
Ken (*Street Fighter II*)
Anavel Gato (*Gundam 0083*)
Racer X (*Speed Racer*)
Devilman (*Devilman*)

Trunks,
Dragon Ball Z

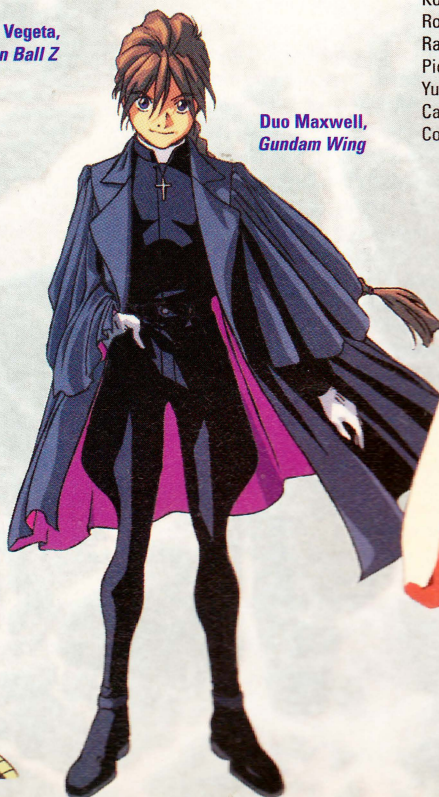


Kenshiro (*Fist of the North Star*)
Jubei (*Ninja Scroll*)
Jo-Jo (*Jo-Jo's Bizarre Adventure*)
Hiei (*Yu Yu Hakusho*)
Onizuka (*GTO*)
Kurama (*Yu Yu Hakusho*)
Ryo (*Ronin Warriors/Samurai Troopers*)
Kyoosuke (*Kimagure Orange Road*)
Terry Sanders Jr.
(*Gundam: The 08th MS Team*)
Ogre Slayer (*Ogre Slayer*)
Jiro Yamada (Dai Gaidouji) (*Nadesico*)
Yota (*Video Girl Ai*)
Larva (*Vampire Princess Miyu*)
Parn (*Record of Lodoss War*)
Itto Ogami (*Lone Wolf and Cub*)
Takezo (*Vagabond*)
Jet Black (*Cowboy Bebop*)
Mark Venture (*Star Blazers*)
Rick Hunter/Hikaru Ichijo
(*Robotech/Macross*)
Silvermask (*Heroic Legend of Arslan*)
Leon (*Bubblegum Crisis*)
Kaneda (*Akira*)
Masato (*Zeorymer*)
Gawl (*Generator Gawl*)
Yuhi (*Ceres: Celestial Legend*)
Koh Uraki (*Gundam 0083*)
Ross Sylibus (*Armitage III*)
Ranma (*Ranma 1/2*)
Piccolo (*Dragon Ball Z*)
Yuji (*Blue Gender*)
Captain Nemo (*Nadia*)
Count D (*Pet Shop of Horrors*)

Vegeta,
Dragon Ball Z



Duo Maxwell,
Gundam Wing



Kuwabara
Yu Yu Hakusho



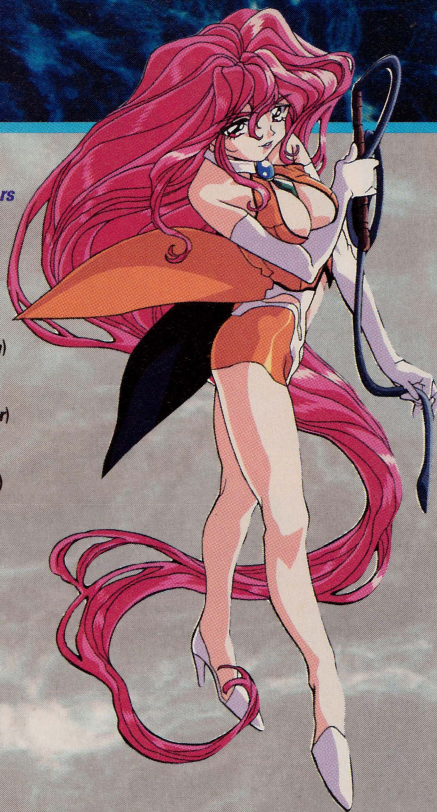
The Women

Cutey Honey (*Cutey Honey*)
 Misato (*Evangelion*)
 Utena (*Revolutionary Girl Utena*)
 Suka Langley Soryu (*Evangelion*)
 Aomi Armitage (*Armitage III*)
 Nagero (*Ninja Scroll*)
 Anaoe (*X the Movie*)
 Urd (*Oh My Goddess!*)
 Fujiko (*Lupin III*)
 Yorrigan (*Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge*)
 Chocolate Misu (*Sorcerer Hunters*)
 Momomi (*Mezzo Forte*)
 Chun Li (*Street Fighter II*)
 Eddy One (*Gundam Wing*)
 Anthy (*Revolutionary Girl Utena*)
 Peko (*Peach Girl*)
 Rei Ayanami (*Evangelion*)
 Eye Valentine (*Cowboy Bebop*)
 Kriiss Asagiri (*Bubblegum Crisis*)
 Ama Garahau (*Gundam 0083*)
 Gally Vincent (*GunsmithCats*)
 Nadia (*Nadia: Sectet of Blue Water*)
 Queen Emeraldas (*Queen Emeraldas, Maetel Legend, Galaxy Express 999, Arcadia of my Youth*)
 Yumi (*Urusei Yatsura*)
 Milla (*Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*)
 Tia (*Shiranui (Fatal Fury)*)
 Haruhara (*FLCL*)
 Minmay (*Robotech/Macross*)
 Rei (*Sol Bianca*)
 Yoko Ishihara (*Sanctuary*)
 Zeiram (*Zeiram the Animation*)
 Strawberry (*Saber Marionette J*)
 Aika (*Agent Aika*)
 Yaten (*Urusei Yatsura*)
 Yaya (*Blood, The Last Vampire*)
 Magha (*Slayers*)
 Amano (*Video Girl Ai*)
 Ranma (*Ranma 1/2*)
 Sunny (*Sol Bianca*)
 Princess (*Record of Lodoss War*)
 Makie (*Wicked City*)
 Misu (*Sorcerer Hunters*)

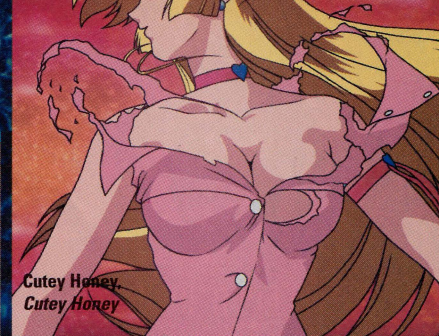
Sylia Stingray (*Bubblegum Crisis*)
 Jury (*Revolutionary Girl Utena*)
 Sawa (*Kite*)
 Angel (*The Big O*)
 Attim M-Zak (*Seraphic Feather*)
 Bulma (*Dragon Ball Z*)
 Pai Thunder (*Dangaioh*)
 Sofia (*Battle Arena Toshinden*)
 Sailor Uranus (*Sailor Moon*)
 Ginrei (*Giant Robo*)
 Cammy (*Street Fighter II*)
 Nene (*Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040*)
 Rio (*Burn-Up W*)
 Dorothy Catalonia (*Gundam Wing*)
 April (*Sol Bianca*)
 Belldandy (*Oh My Goddess!*)
 Motoko Kusunagi (*Ghost in the Shell*)
 Kiddy Phenil (*Silent Möbius*)
 Sally Po (*Gundam Wing*)
 Shampoo (*Ranma 1/2*)
 Felicia (*Night Warriors: Darkstalkers' Revenge*)
 Alcyone (*Magic Knight Rayearth*)
 Arshes Nei (*Bastard!!*)
 Tiara (*Shamanic Princess*)
 Madoka (*Kimagure Orange Road*)
 Ryoko (*Tenchi Muyo!*)
 Sailor Mercury (*Sailor Moon*)
 Naru (*Love Hina*)
 Sailor Venus (*Sailor Moon*)
 Kei (*Dirty Pair*)
 Deedlit (*Record of Lodoss War*)
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 Sharon Apple (*Macross Plus*)
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 Gally/Alita (*Battle Angel/Battle Angel Alita*)
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 Sango (*Inu-Yasha*)
 Iczer 2 (*Iczer-One*)

Lucrezia Noin (*Gundam Wing*)
 Miho (*Key the Metal Idol*)
 Miyu (*Vampire Princess Miyu*)
 Deunan Knute (*Appleseed*)
 Nobuko (*Video Girl Ai*)
 Sailor Mars (*Sailor Moon*)
 Kodachi (*Ranma 1/2*)
 Sailor Saturn (*Sailor Moon*)
 Ayeka (*Tenchi Muyo!*)
 Kekko Kamen (*Kekko Kamen*)
 Mihoshi (*Tenchi Muyo!*)
 Luffy (*Gall Force*)
 Meia Gisborn (*Vandread*)
 Lipumira (*Maps*)
 Akane (*Ranma 1/2*)
 Haruka Minato (*Nadesico*)
 Birdy (*Birdy the Mighty*)
 Nanai Miguel (*Char's Counterattack*)

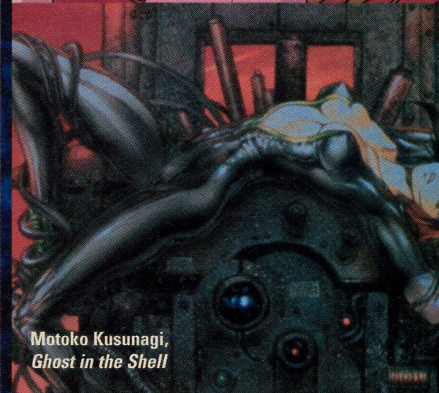
Tira Misu,
Sorcerer Hunters



Cutey Honey,
Cutey Honey



Motoko Kusunagi,
Ghost in the Shell



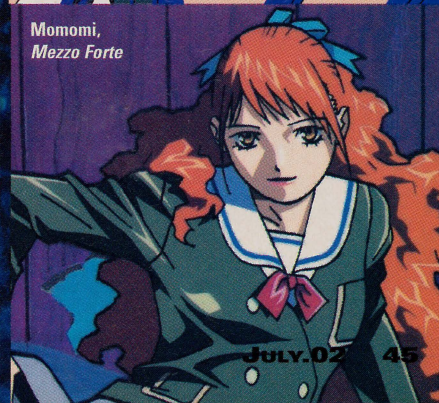
Urd,
Oh My Goddess!



Sailor Neptune and Sailor Uranus,
Sailor Moon S



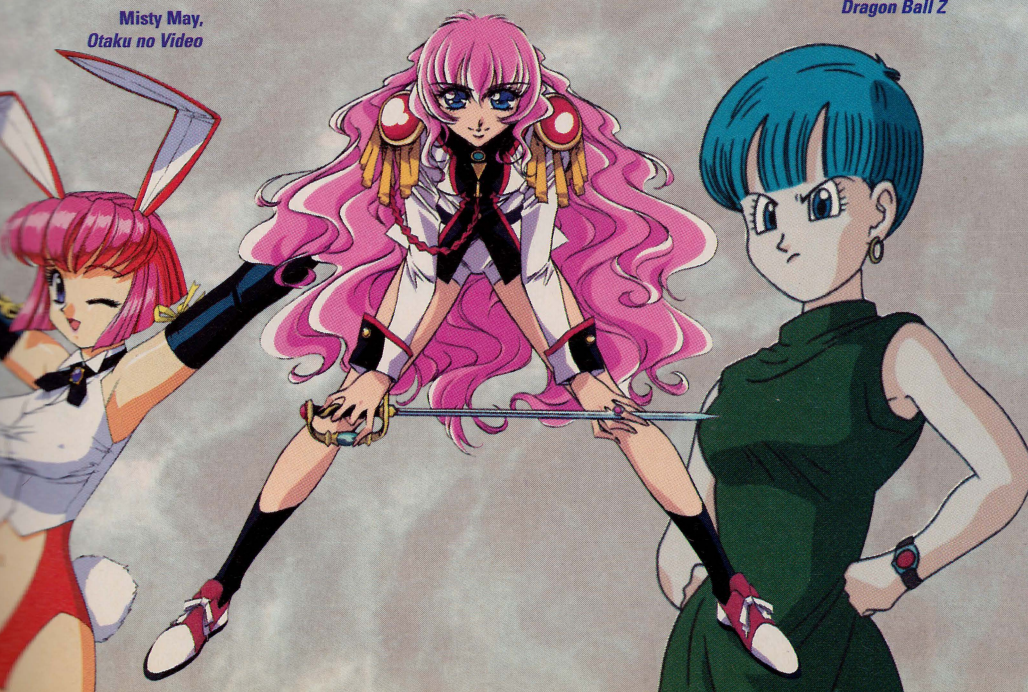
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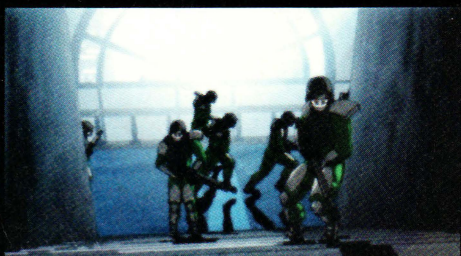




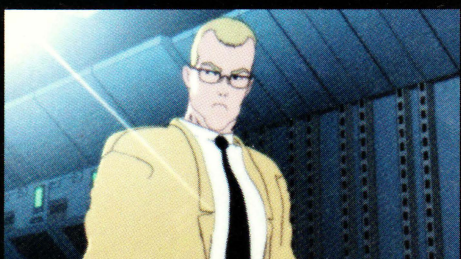
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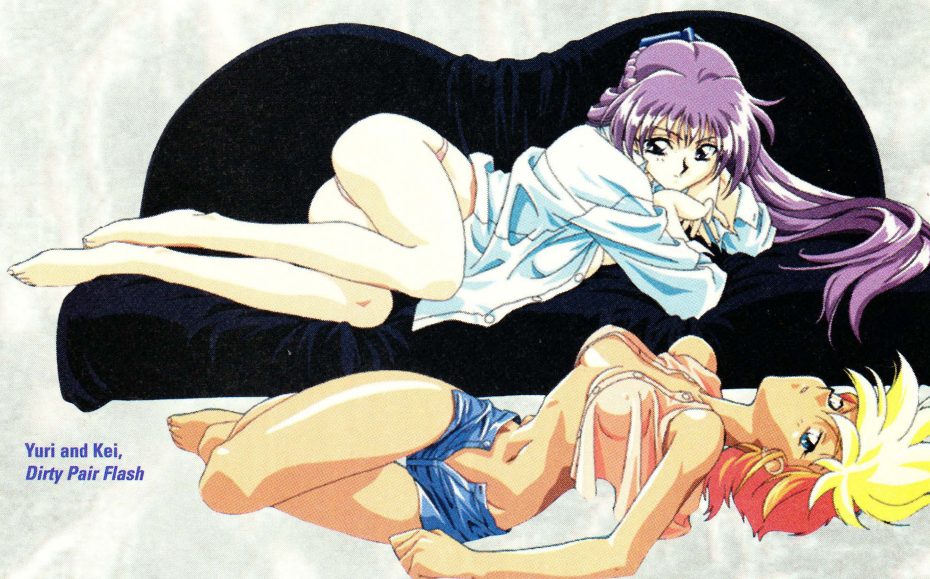
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Sorcerer Hunters



From the Forest

Takashi Oshiguchi's tenure as manager of Tokyo's *Manga no Mori* ("Comics Forest") has been invaluable for his role as an anime/manga journalist. His writings have appeared in *ANIMAGE* magazine and the comic trade journal *COMIC BOX*.



ON SHÔJO MANGA, PEACH GIRL, AND MALE AND FEMALE READERS

This month's topic is *shôjo* (girls') manga. Japanese manga, when compared to comics from other countries has a lot of unique qualities and *shôjo* manga is one genre that is a major part of the Japanese manga culture. And although I refer to Japanese *shôjo* manga as a genre, it is comprised of a wide range of titles—everything from superheroine titles such as *Sailor Moon* and *Cardcaptor Sakura*, fantasy adventure/suspense horror titles such as *Fushigi Yûgi* and *Ayashi no Ceres* (*Ceres Celestial Legend*), love stories such as *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijô* (*His and Her Circumstances*) of which Hideaki Anno did a much-acclaimed anime adaptation, dramas about normal everyday life such as Aoi Hiiragi's *Mimi o Sumaseba* ("If You Listen Closely," a.k.a. *Whisper of the Heart*) of which Hayao Miyazaki is a fan, and comedies such as *Chibi Maruko-chan*. The subject matter is varied as well as the art style and story.

The titles and manga artists I've listed above are all bestsellers at specialty shops that also sell anime and video games. In other words, they're popular with the "maniac," a.k.a. *otaku*, fan shops. Titles other than these types of titles (listed above), don't sell that well at the *otaku* shops. However, there are many titles that sell well at general bookstores that have less of an *otaku* level. Miwa Ueda's *Peach Girl* is one of those titles.

Ueda's art style is not at all dated. You can tell with just a glance that her style is very fashionable. She is a popular and talented artist. So why isn't she popular with the *otaku*?

The answer is simple. The content is a very sappy love story depicted with the exciting ups and downs of girls getting together with guys, breaking up with them, and doing it all over again.

But you might be saying to yourself, "Wait a minute, isn't *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijô* a love story too?"

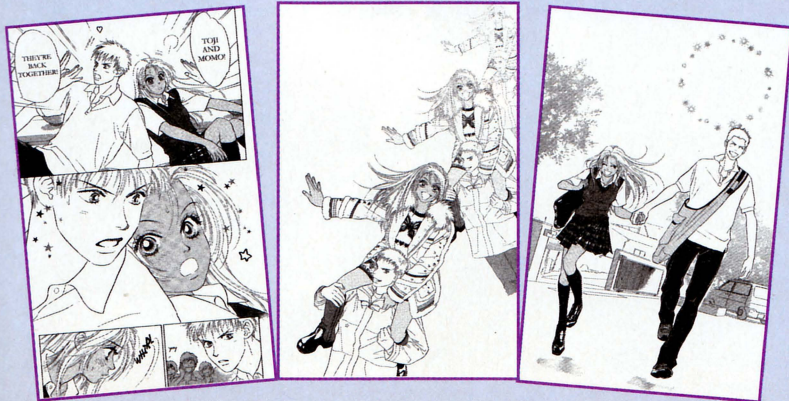
So what's the difference between *Peach Girl* and *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijô*? Male readers can understand and even identify with *Kareshi Kanojo no Jijô*. Frankly, I think that male readers are not drawn to *Peach Girl*. Furthermore, I think that only today's teenage girls can understand the feelings expressed in *Peach Girl*. I might be biased but, I think it is too real for male *otaku* readers with their fantasies and illusions about maids.

On the other hand, I think that only girls of the same age can truly identify with the joys and sorrows of romance depicted in *Peach Girl*. In particular, I think that Sae, who will go to any extreme to put down the main character Momo, plays a major role. Sae's schemes drives the plot development. I suppose that naive male readers may be taken aback by Sae's conniving evil. And from the other perspective, girls seem to personally know someone just like Sae! In the individual manga volumes, there was even a popular bonus feature where readers wrote in about their own personal experiences with girls like Sae. It's almost as if Sae is the real main character of *Peach Girl*.

To write this month's column, I re-read all 12 volumes that have been published to date. I've come to think that the main character Momo is actually an unlikeable character. She's a very passive character who doesn't have a will of her own. And she just cries about how unhappy she is and how hard it is to be around Sae. Although, I guess Sae is not a likeable character either. But even a old man like me gets wrapped up in the story. That's how good a writer Miwa Ueda is, and that's how she attracts her readers.

However... *Peach Girl* will probably never be adapted into an anime. And even if it does get adapted, anime fans will probably not like it. It's just like the manga *GALS!* That manga was extremely popular with girls, but the anime it was adapted into was not successful with anime fans. A lot can be read into the fact that *GALS!* was considered to have lost out to the anime *Ojamajo Do Re Mi*.

I wonder how American fans of Japanese anime will receive a sappy *shôjo* manga like *Peach Girl*. Maybe it will be popular with fans of *Beverly Hills 90210*. ☆



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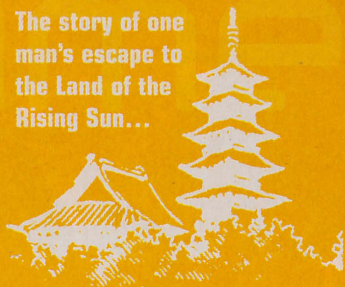
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Geoffrey Tebbetts' DIARIES OF THE COUNTRY BUMPKIN

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LIFE AND CHERRIES

The story of one man's escape to the Land of the Rising Sun...



Picture it if you will—it's a beautiful spring day in Somewhere, Japan. A student is on his or her way to school, but stops suddenly. Up ahead is the ravishing girl or head-turning boy of whom the student has been dreaming every day. The two of them meet in an awkwardly silent moment, then smile at each other with a small blush. That's when the signal is made, and the two are blindsided by a torrent of pink cherry-blossom petals....

Okay, rewind. What's up with that? Just what is it with cherry blossoms? Sure, they may induce romance and peace (as well as allergic reactions in some people), but

why cherry blossoms? Why not rose petals or falling autumnal leaves? What makes cherry blossoms so special, and why are the Japanese so attracted to them when they start to fall? I decided to make like Sam Spade and investigate.

As spring begins every year in Japan, tens of thousands of cherry trees (*sakura*) start to bud and bloom. The weather reports follow the spread and growth of the blossoms, much like a reversal of the fall foliage charts in America. As the trees become pinker and pinker with the growing blossoms, Japanese people drop everything and plan for *hanami* or "flower-watching". People flock to the nearest parks, spread out tarps and blankets, and party. The parties can range from the quietest and most discreet of lunches to loud clamors held by companies where the saké flows like water.

The history behind Japan's love affair with the *sakura* spans centuries. Up until the middle of the eighth century, the Japanese preferred viewing apricot blossoms. However, as the country individualized in the Heian Era, the Japanese switched to the *sakura* blossom, since apricot trees were originally from China. Over time, farmers began to use the falling blossoms to predict the rice harvest, often drinking blessed liquor under the trees. Shoguns held lavish parties amongst the nobles, but by the 1800's, *hanami* was a popular event for commoners, too. In modern society, both companies and families hold big picnics under the spread of *sakura*. Since a few of my friends and I had already witnessed this spectacle last year, it was only fair for us to join the commotion. For investigation purposes, of course.

Our timing was near-perfect this year, as our Saturday picnic in the park happened at the exact time that the blossoms were expected to fall in pink showers. Two weeks before, the park was close to empty, but the *hanami* season brought parties out in droves. Dozens of families and companies dotted the park with blue tarps. While many were simple and improvised gatherings of store-bought sushi and a lot of alcohol, others were too structured—some low-level businessmen staked out a spot with ropes and waited for hours as they reserved space for their company picnic, while parties already in motion were neatly spread out with place mats, tons of food, and speeches from the person in charge.

As people flocked to parks for the first major event of spring, so did many businesses. Local restaurants set up kiosks in advance, selling snacks like *okonomiyaki*, *takoyaki*, and chocolate-covered bananas to the locals. Others tried to take the carnival route by setting up shooting galleries and serving cotton candy. There were also businesses that took advantage of the mystique of *hanami*; many people bought strips of paper and made wishes by writing them down and hanging the papers from the branches.

It took me a whole weekend of *hanami* to ponder about the attraction with the *sakura*, but I still don't think I completely understand.

However, as I watched all of the petals fall from the wind and rain that sadly ruined our picnic, it made some sense with what I had read before. The cherry blossom is a fragile thing, yet it is graceful when it falls; some people have linked that elegance to the spirit of the Japanese, the *yamato-damashii*. In the same idea, however, the quick fall of the blossoms could also symbolize the *yamato-damashii* value of national sacrifice. It could be many things—romance, reminiscence, peace, the coming of spring, business, an excuse to party—but *hanami* is one of the truly beautiful and unique things that Japan should be proud of. ☆



Photos by Geoffrey Tebbetts

Geoffrey Tebbetts currently works for the JET program as an assistant English teacher in Matsuyama, Japan. Write to him at geoffinJapan@lycos.com

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ULTRAVIOLENCE Gratuitous weaponry and explosions don't qualify by themselves; be on the lookout for severed body parts and/or buckets of gore.



MASTERPIECE THEATER Consider this an anime classic; may contain socially redeeming themes.



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SUPER SCIENCE Traditional sci-fi gadgets, themes, and plot devices, both silly and serious. May include mad scientists.



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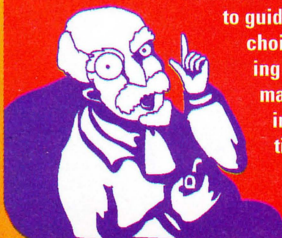
BAD WORDS !#@&! Beware: salty language ahead. Use caution with younger viewers.



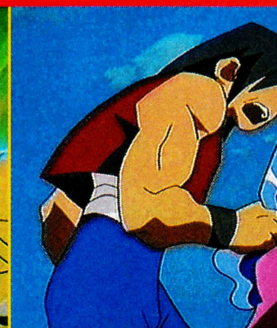
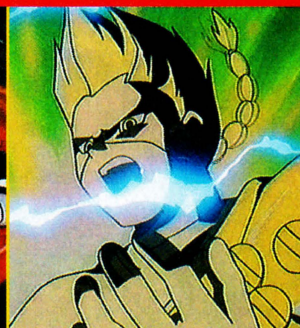
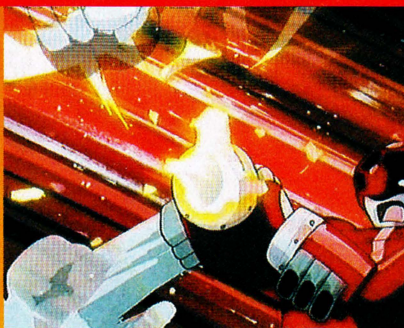
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The Major Sez...

Welcome, my friends, to the wonderful world of Japanese animation! My reviewers will attempt to guide you in your choices of viewing material. I may even chime in myself from time to time. Enjoy!



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WHO BUYS A VIDEO GAME TO PLAY
A COOK NAMED WING WANG?



POWERSTONE

VOL. 2: BATTLE TRAINING

VOL. 3: DANGEROUS JOURNEYS

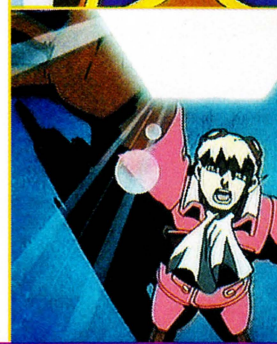
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ROBERT MCCARTHY



ADV ■ Bilingual DVD ■ 100 mins. ■ US\$19.98 each ■ Vol. 2: DPS002, Vol. 3: DPS003
Based on the video game of the same name

© REIJI SAGA • SORA INOUE/K-FIGHT COMMITTEE • KIDS STATION

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED...

REAL BOUT HIGH SCHOOL

VOL. 1: ENTER THE SAMURAI GIRL



Ryoko Mitsurugi is just a typical tenth-grader at Daimon High School: every day, on her way to class, she is assaulted by the entire student body. And she can't complain to the principal—unless she wants to fight him, too, because at Daimon High, fights are sanctioned by the administration! Luckily, Ryoko is a *kendo* master and the current K-Fight champion.

What's a K-Fight? That's what Principal Todo calls his elaborate fighting curriculum. When students get into a K-Fight (which can be at any time during the school day), a cute play-by-play girl (and her fight-card-carrying ring girls) jump out and turn the fight into a spectacle. A diminutive *otaku* admirer of Ryoko is there, shooting entire rolls of film. But wait...there's more! Every now and again, Ryoko's mysterious amulet glows and she's warped into some strange world, where she has superpowers and a mysterious girl who calls Ryoko "The Demon Lord of Yemen" makes her defeat gigantic monsters! After she does, Ryoko ends up back in her own world, hours later.

Okay: anybody else wondering how Studio Gonzo managed to cram in nearly every magical-girl, martial-arts, and high-school anime cliché into *Real Bout High School*? The "girl gets attacked by hundreds right after the opening bell of school" scene is right out of *Ranma 1/2* and come to think of it, doesn't a *kendo*-proficient, short-skirted, ill-tempered redhead 14-year-old just scream—*fan service*? Where's the originality here? And if this isn't enough to make you slap your forehead in sheer incredulity, wait 'till her amulet (a staple of magical-girl anime, inserted so toy manufacturers can sell miniature plastic versions of it that have makeup inside) starts glowing and she's sent to Cephire or wherever.

Of course, there's a reason some of this stuff is cliché...it's funny, and sometimes it works. There are some great laugh-out-loud moments (especially dealing with the crazy announcer and ring girls), and the whole plot is just so convoluted and ridiculous that you just have to keep watching to find out what's next. I still have some reservations about where the story is going to go from here, and I certainly can't call *Real Bout High School* a classic, must-buy series...but I can see how some magical-girl, martial-arts, high-school fans might get a kick out of it.

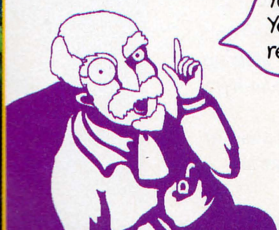
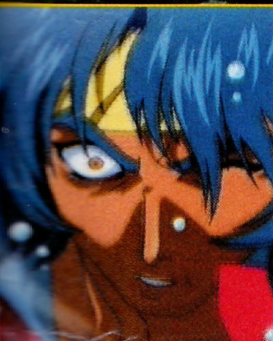
In Episode 1, Ryoko takes on her rival and *sempai*, Azumi Kiribayashi, in a K-Fight championship match. Azumi is cocky and confident, but loses the match to the younger Ryoko. But right after her win, she is spirited away to the other world. Thus begins Episode 2, in which Ryoko fights a huge demon monster and, after making it back home, meets the strongest man in the world, the former Daimon student who founded K-Fight and seems to have some connection to the Demon World. Episode 3 sees Ryoko go to study under Tessai Onizuka (no relation to the guy from *GTO*) and perfect her sword technique. Episode 4 is more of a lighthearted comedy, with Ryoko and friends (and rivals) preparing a birthday party for Miyako, Tessai's granddaughter.

The English dub is good; the voices match the Japanese ones quite well. Although I'm normally a subtitles sort of guy, I could see with this title why dubs can be convenient—not having to concentrate on the Japanese made me happy and complacent.

DVD FEATURES: It seems excessively PR-ish to tout a DVD's animated menus (have you ever seen a DVD *without* menus?), but *Real Bout High School*'s menus rock. They're set up in a classic Capcom *Street Fighter* style, with life bars framing clips of fighting action. The single DVD is packed with extras, from "making-of" featurettes to English outtakes to the original Japanese TV spots. A lengthy translator's notes booklet is included as well. And to top it all off, the video quality is immaculate. All in all, TOKYOPOP did an exceptional job putting this package together, and it's obvious that they are excited about and dedicated to this series.

CHRIS KOHLER

You know, Yemen is a real country...



TOKYOPOP • Bilingual DVD • 100 mins. • US\$29.99 • TPDV-1372
From Studio Gonzo of Blue Sub No. 6 and Final Fantasy Unlimited fame

anime **REVIEWS** ★ **BEST OF THE WEST**

Major Anime™

Whether you're a parent worried about nudity or a sci-fi buff just looking for girls with guns, the helpful icons in Major Anime™'s AnimeIcon™ System will aid you in your quest for the perfect video.



COURTESY BREASTS Cover the young-guns' eyes; there's young misses prancing around without their tops on or other nudie displays.



ESP Extrasensory powers, such as telepathy, firestarting, telekinesis ...also includes sorcery.



ULTRAVIOLENCE Gratuitous weaponry and explosions don't qualify by themselves; be on the lookout for severed body parts and/or buckets of gore.



MASTERPIECE THEATER Consider this an anime classic; may contain socially redeeming themes.



KUNG-FU FIGHTING Martial arts of all shapes and sizes, silly and serious.



ROMANTIC HIJINKS Boy meets girl; boy loses girl and comes back with her sisters; the neighbors interfere, etc.



MONDO MECHA From spaceships to cyborgs to giant wooden robots, the kind of mechanical devices you'll find only in anime.



SUPER SCIENCE Traditional sci-fi gadgets, themes, and plot devices, both silly and serious. May include mad scientists.



NOT OF THIS WORLD Close encounters of a less-than-friendly kind with invaders from other worlds or dimensions. They never come in peace and often leave in pieces.



EVIL OVERLORD Megalomania, anime style. World domination is the theme when you see this one.



IDOL SINGERS Expect to hear singing from girls (sometimes boys) in outrageous costumes.



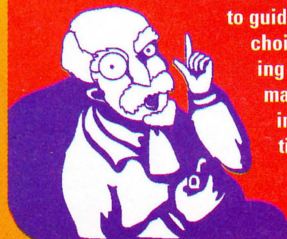
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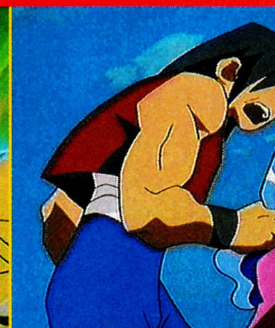
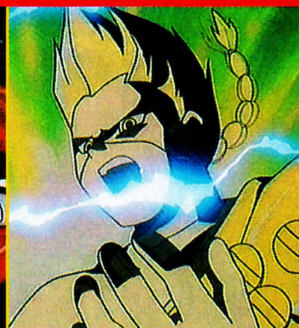
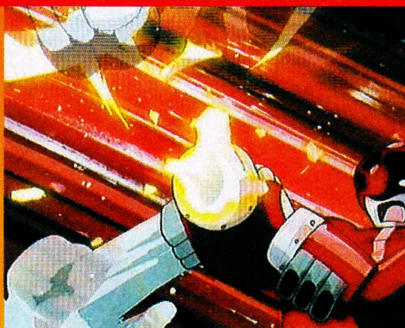
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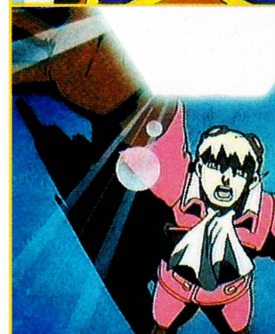
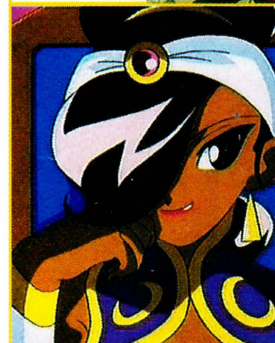
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ADV ■ Bilingual DVD ■ 100 mins. ■ US\$19.98 each ■ Vol. 2: DPS002, Vol. 3: DPS003
Based on the video game of the same name

© Sunrise • Bandai Visual

THAT '70S BOT

Z-MIND



I have always had a hard time with the old "giant super robot" show genre—I've tried, but I've always thought they were just too darned cheesy. That's why I wasn't holding out much hope when I sat down to watch **Z-Mind**, the newest attempt by Bandai to resurrect this now much-hackneyed genre. I figured on another low-budget "it's retro so it must be cool" fest of poor detail, ugly characters and heavy, blocky shading. I expected bell-bottoms, forced '70s dialogue and slipshod animation masquerading as "nostalgia." Imagine then my surprise when I popped the disc into my DVD player and found that I was halfway through this series' six episodes before I realized it. And it was fun, engrossing and downright addictive!

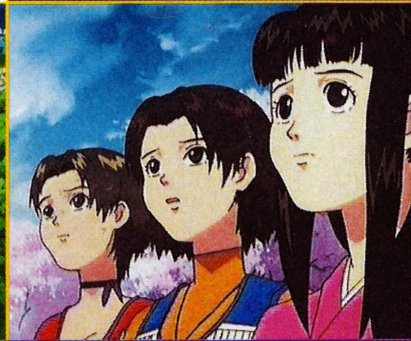
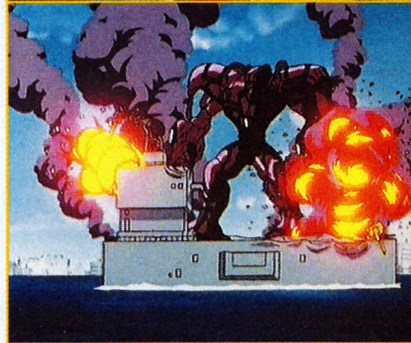
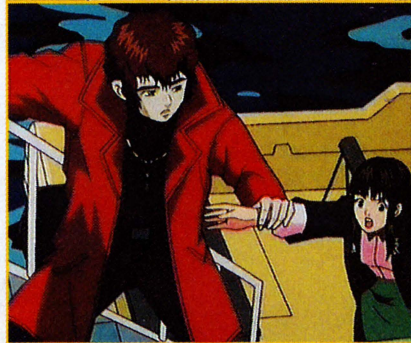
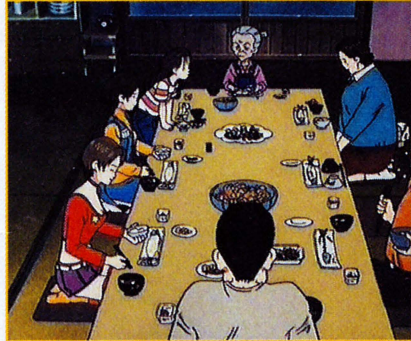
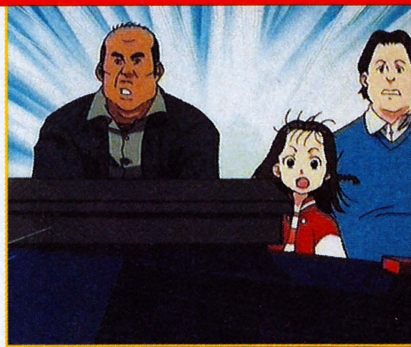
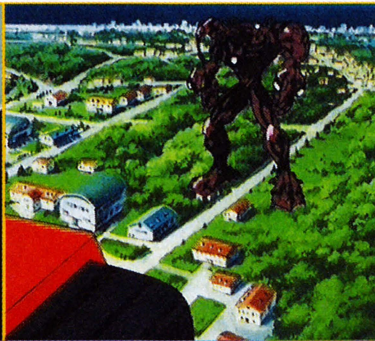
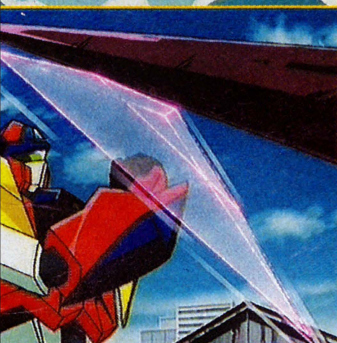
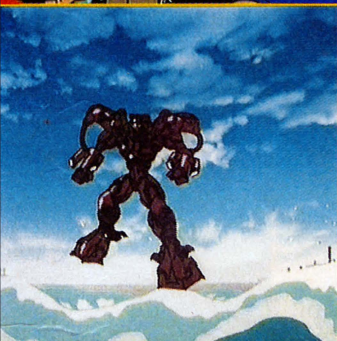
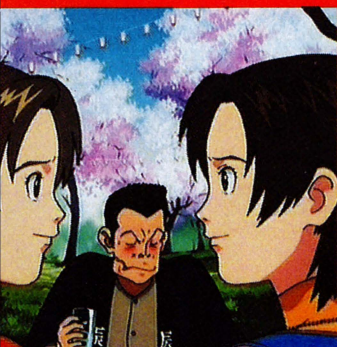
While **Z-Mind** is a take (or retake) on the "aliens invade the Earth and one giant robot stands against them" formula, it stays engaging and exciting the whole way through. **Z-Mind** looks '70s-ish, but there's no mistaking the smoothness and accuracy of the animation—everything is well detailed and brightly colored, and the final product is a slick piece of eye candy that mecha fans are sure to love. In addition, the obviously CG dimensional warping effects are very well done and integrated. The character designs are clean and the two twins are quite cute. The mecha designs are excellent. The Z-Mind itself looks something like a cross between Brave Maximus (Fortress Maximus to North American *Transformers* fans) and the Dancougar.

To go over the plot of **Z-Mind** in detail would be pointless. Every convention—from marauding aliens to a parent-built super robot, flying battleships, and secret government agencies get its proverbial 15 minutes during the series' two-and-a-half hours. Suffice to say that the giant robot Z-Mind will only allow itself to be piloted by a very specific group of girls, three (later four) sisters whose scientist father built it for the U.S. Government and then piloted it in a tragic battle. Now it's up to the girls to use their father's legacy to defend their family, their town and all of humanity from a race of aliens that are capable of controlling not only space, but time as well.

As a short series, **Z-Mind** doesn't have a whole TV season to play out a "monster of the week" theme, so the battles involving the Z-Mind all have a tightly plotted purpose. The Z-Mind's weapons will bring a tear of joy to those who miss rocket punches and other such classic finishing moves, and its transformation sequence—didn't I mention it was made out of three smaller robots that all join together, and link up to form one big robot—is FANTASTIC. It was so mechanically detailed and awesome that I watched it ALL 6 TIMES! I had this urge to "Form Blazing Sword" when I was done...

Z-Mind is a great show for those who love the giant robots of yore, as well as for those who want to see something a little different. With a solid story, good pacing, slick animation, interesting characters and even a bit of the everyday hum-drum thrown in, **Z-Mind** serves up an anime feast like nobody's business. I guess that makes the **Z-Mind** the ultimate Iron Chef! Except for the food part...okay, never mind.

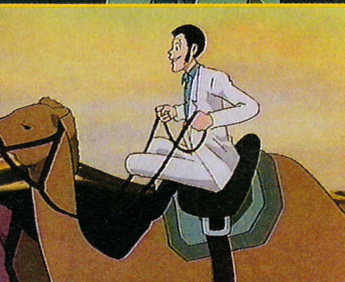
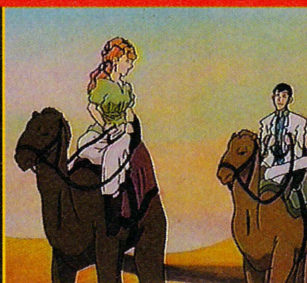
ADAM REHORN



Bandai • Bilingual DVD • 150 mins • US\$34.98 • 1570
The complete series on one DVD; Three girls, three bots, one sexy guy

REVIEWS ★ BEST OF THE WEST

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THE ROAD TO MOROCCO...WITH LUPIN, NOT BOB HOPE

LUPIN III THE SECRET OF TWILIGHT GEMINI



In *Lupin III: The Secret of Twilight Gemini*, anime's most famous professional thief is summoned by an aging crime boss who has a proposition: travel to Morocco and locate the lost treasure of the Gelts tribe. To aid him in his quest, he gives Lupin one half of "The Twilight," a huge diamond cut perfectly in half. The gem alone would normally be treasure enough for anyone, but the old man insists that it's the key to finding something much bigger. Lupin's in a sentimental mood (the old guy isn't in very good shape), so he agrees to take the job. But before he reaches Morocco, Lupin gets caught up in a chaotic chase involving Interpol and a mysterious group of armored badies who are after the jewel.

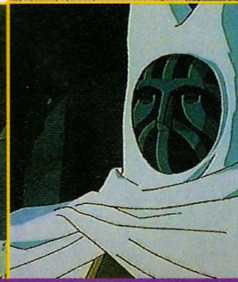
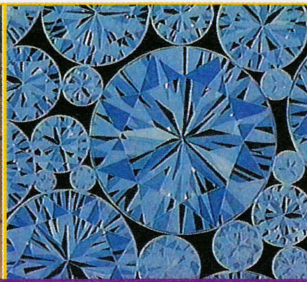
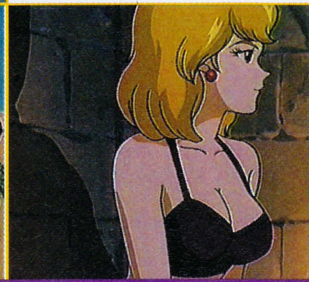
Arriving in Morocco, he quickly becomes enmeshed in tribal politics, and begins putting together pieces of his employer's history in the region. Apparently as a young man, the now-aged boss had fallen in love with a tribal princess and fought Lawrence of Arabia-style to protect a doomed tribe from the rival faction that eventually destroyed it. Now this lost tribe, the Gelts, is seeking to reestablish itself, though there seem to be two factions seeking to accomplish this: a ragtag band of freedom fighters, and a scary group of cultists wearing white robes reminiscent of Klan uniforms.

This is the Morocco of Hollywood, with an air of mystery and endless fruit stands just waiting to be overturned by the occasional car chase. There are plenty of car chases, explosions, and narrow escapes in the movie. Everyone Lupin meets has some piece of the puzzle, and in the end it all comes more or less together with a confrontation in a lost ruin.

The term "McGuffin" (attributed to the great suspense director Alfred Hitchcock) refers to any item that motivates the plot of a movie because the characters are trying to get it. Here the McGuffin is the diamond and its missing half, which can reveal the lost treasure when the two halves are reunited. But McGuffins are only as interesting to audiences as they are to the heroes chasing after them, and here Lupin's motives seem a little unclear. Does he want it for himself, or for his employer? Does he care about the Gelts, or is he just turned on by the cute blonde he meets? Lupin's female foil Fujiko Mine, who shows up in Morocco working for someone else, is motivated only by greed. Lupin's partner Jigen makes only a couple of appearances, and as usual, swordsman Goemon isn't used nearly enough.

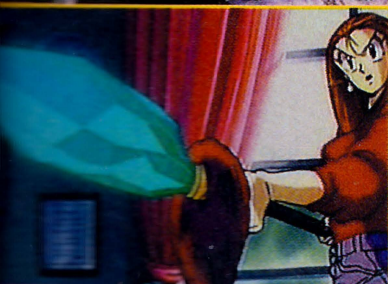
Perhaps the creators realized something was missing. That would at least explain their attempt to distract viewers with no less than five nude scenes, all of them female, only one of which is even remotely rooted in characterization. During one flashback, we also learn about a Gelts princess who worked as a dancing girl. Why would a princess work as a dancing girl? Ah, I see. So she can dance in a bikini during the closing credits.

DANIEL HUDDLESTON



FUNimation ■ English VHS/Bilingual DVD ■ 90 mins. ■ US\$19.95/\$24.95 ■ FM03913 (VHS)/FM03923 (DVD)
First in a series of *Lupin III* releases from FUNimation

© Takashi Shiina/Shogakukan • Asatsu Agency • Toei Animation



LET THE GRATUITOUS GHOST VIOLENCE BEGIN!

GHOST SWEEPER MIKAMI THE MOVIE

To the tune of the *Ghostbusters* theme song: "When there's something strange / in your neighborhood / Who ya gonna call? *Ghost Sweeper Mikami!*" Well, it may not flow off the tongue as well as "Ghostbusters" and there aren't any proton packs, but the title character in *Ghost Sweeper Mikami*, exorcist-for-hire Reiko Mikami, is nonetheless just as effective as Peter, Egon and the gang at ridding the world of ghosts and demons—and twice as hardcore.

Based on Takashi Shiina's long-running manga of the same name that appeared in Japan's weekly mega-anthology *SHŌNEN SUNDAY*, and a similarly long-running television series, *Ghost Sweeper Mikami* follows the misadventures of "ghost sweeper" Reiko Mikami and her ragtag group of supernatural hunters as they try their darnedest to run a successful exorcism business, but usually end up getting in way over their heads. By the way, a "ghost sweeper" is any person who hunts down and eliminates ghosts, spirits and demons. In Mikami's case, she and her company do this service for large sums of money—and why not? Ghost sweeping is tough work!

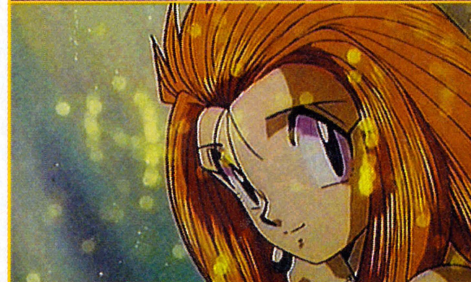
Fans who have seen *Phantom Quest Corp* will notice many similarities between that series and *Ghost Sweeper Mikami* (sexy exorcist who wields magic sword runs company that eliminates spirits, etc.). Too many similarities, it seems—it's rumored that Takashi Shiina ended up filing a lawsuit against Pioneer for their infringement! The movie begins with a flashback to Japan's feudal era and a mighty battle between an exorcist of the past and the mack daddy of all demons, Nosferatu (who surprisingly looks more like Satan than a vampire). Though Nosferatu was banished all those years ago, he was never really killed and is now trying to make a comeback, much to the chagrin of all life on Earth. As you might have figured out by now, there's only one person in the world with enough spiritual power to stop the dastardly Nosferatu, and that person is Mikami.

Ghost Sweeper Mikami is an action-comedy with an emphasis on the comedy. Thanks to the variety of characters and the way they contrast with each other, it's packed full of zany slapstick of the over-the-top variety and doesn't hesitate to serve it up in large helpings. I got a real kick out of Mikami's neurotic greediness, love of money and the hyper-violent manner in which she treats her sidekick Yokoshima (he doesn't deserve any love anyway since all he wants is to get into Mikami's miniskirt). Truly the sign of a good boss. The other characters have their special charms as well: Okinu is a clueless ghost that helps out; Pietro uses his vampire abilities for good; and Father Karasu proves that sermons are for more than putting people to sleep.

Ghost Sweeper Mikami is pretty entertaining, but I'm not without my gripes, one of which is that unless you've read the manga or seen the TV series (both of which are currently Japanese only) there's no possible way to get to know all the characters that well—the movie is just too short. The animation is not up to par with most other anime "movies" (a term often applied by English licensors to OAVs, TV specials, etc.), and from what I've seen, is hardly better than the television series it succeeds. And can anyone seriously justify the size of Mikami's eyes? She ought to have a license for those things!

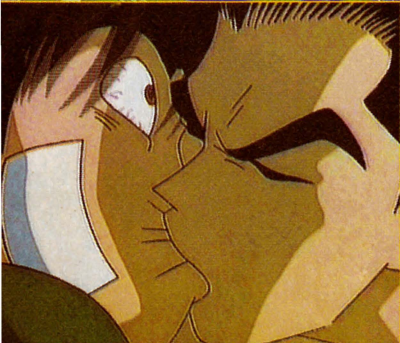
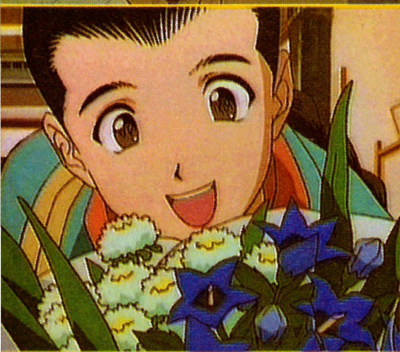
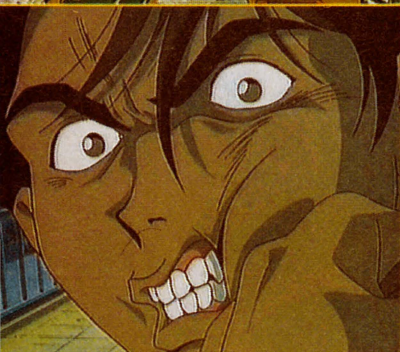
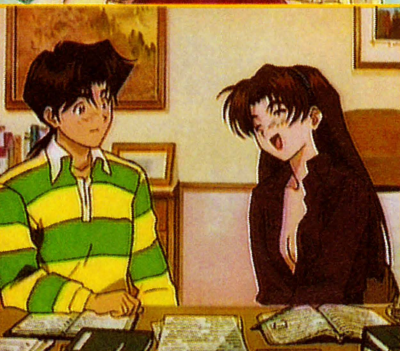
For being true to itself and not trying to be anything deeper than the wacky freckfest that it is, I enjoyed almost every minute watching *Ghost Sweeper Mikami*. No messages about love, teamwork, or the joys of animal husbandry, it's just supposed to be funny—no strings attached. Will the television series follow the movie release? Only time will tell.

MATT LOPEZ



Manga Entertainment • Bilingual DVD • 60 mins. • US\$24.95
• Short skirt, huge eyes

© RAI • TMS



SO FUNNY, YOU MAY HUG A TOILET!

GOLDEN BOY TREASURE HUNT DVD VOLUME 1



Thank goodness for DVDs. The great exodus away from analog has brought us a better sound and picture quality, but perhaps best of all is the second chance it affords us to view anime we may have missed. Take **Golden Boy** for example. When the tapes of this OAV came out in the mid-'90s, there was no way an ungainfully employed bagel flipper like myself could afford the six-tape series on top of the other series I was buying at the time. Skip ahead seven years to the present day where, thanks to **Golden Boy: Treasure Hunt**, I can finally make up for the inadequacies of my youthful income. Was it worth the wait? Well...

At first, the story of **Golden Boy** is faintly reminiscent of your typical college road trip movie: after dropping out of school, Kintaro Oe wanders Japan like a vagabond searching for a fresh perspective on life. However, as we soon discover, Kintaro is no ordinary man. The school he dropped out of was the ultra-prestigious Tokyo University, but he only dropped out because he mastered the *entire* curriculum! Armed with his trusty mountain bike, a notebook and pencil, and one of the most amazing learning curves ever, Kintaro will take on any job as long as it has potential to be educational.

What qualifies as an "educational" job to Kintaro, however, may not be exactly what you or I expect: first he works as a janitor for an all female software company; then as a staff member for a small-town election campaign; and finally as a noodle chef in a family-run restaurant. What makes Kintaro's time in each of these positions special is the mark he leaves on people. Whether it's writing an entire management software package on his own to get to a client on time, showing a politician's daughter how to love, or saving an innocent girl from a sham marriage, Kintaro's incredible abilities ensure that no one he meets will ever forget him.

But wait! Don't go off and get any crazy ideas about **Golden Boy** being some sort of heartwarming coming-of-age story—this show is pure comedy in its zaniest form and if you don't walk away with a pain in your gut from laughing it must mean you had your eyes shut and ears plugged. Every aspect of this show is hilarious, from Kintaro's freakishly distorted facial expressions (which resemble Onizuka-sensei's from **GTO**) and toilet-hugging tendencies, to Toshihiro Kawamoto's massively endowed female character designs that have more saline in them than the Pacific Ocean. The DVD case suggests this series be watched by 17 and up and I must say that it's probably not for the younguns since much of the humor meted out is of the raunchy variety. God forbid a parent walks into the bathroom to find their young son or daughter clutching the toilet, emulating Keitaro's own fetishistic tendencies.

After taking an hour-and-a-half lunch break to watch the first DVD installment of **Golden Boy** (I hope my boss doesn't read this), I can now say with full confidence that it was well worth the wait. Shedding the previous one-episode-per-tape format, this DVD is a great value with the first three of six **Golden Boy** episodes—making this disc almost as well-endowed as the women featured on it.

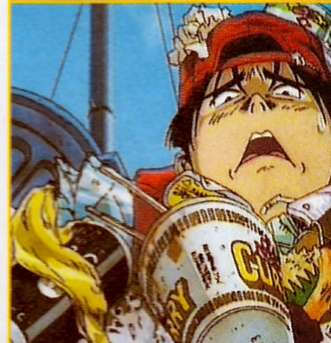
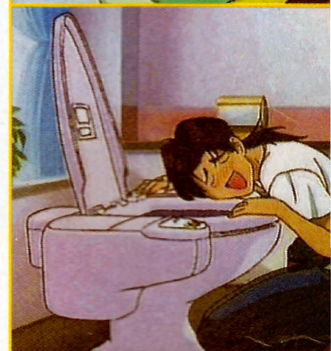
Unlike wine, **Golden Boy** probably doesn't get better with age, but I'm sure its spunky, almost fruity flavored humor is just as good now as it was back when I couldn't see it. Heck, maybe since I'm older now I can appreciate the humor all the more. So, if you're an unfortunate soul like I was and didn't get the chance to see this series the first time around, **Golden Boy: Treasure Hunt** proves that

there's no time like the present to catch up and get a good laugh. A very educational experience indeed!

MATT LOPEZ



Ahh, now this gives my visions of how I met my dear missus.



ADV • Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. • US\$29.98 • DGB/001

"I mean, they have the diameter of a silver dollar, they can't be real!"

© CLAMP • KODANSHA / CINEMA "CARDCAPTOR SAKURA" PARTNERSHIP



WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE,
BUT NOT A CARD TO CAPTURE!



CARDCAPTORS THE MOVIE

Sakura is your average 10- or 11-year-old girl: she goes to school, likes to hang out with her friends and enjoys sweets. However, she also has a job, which is a little bit odd for someone her age. In fact, when you consider that her job is to do mortal combat with powerful spirits and confine their power to magical "Clow Cards," maybe she isn't so average after all.

One day, Sakura enters a prize drawing when she's out shopping, and ends up winning a trip for four to Hong Kong. Adding to Sakura's excitement is the fact that her best friend Madison will be accompanying her, along with her brother Tori (who she could do without) and her brother's friend Julian, a typical CLAMP *bishônen* of the first order. The group arrives in Hong Kong and runs into Sakura's friends, Li and Meilin, who are natives of the bustling island metropolis.

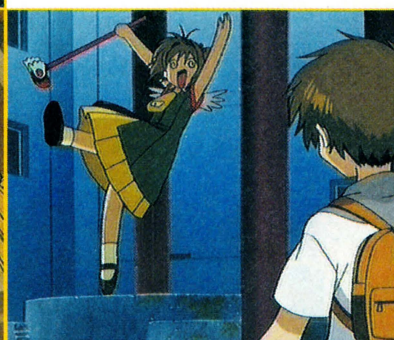
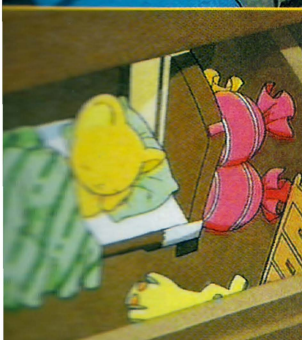
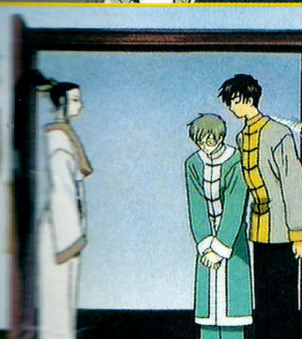
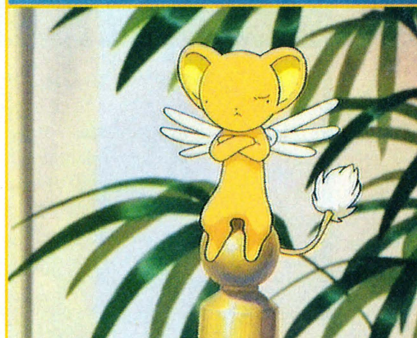
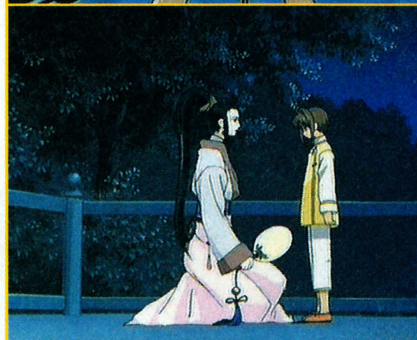
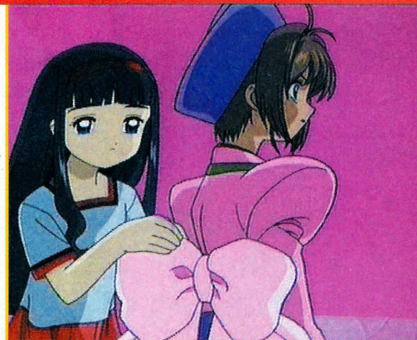
Suddenly, however, things take a turn for the worse. It's quickly made apparent that luck had nothing to do with her win—some force has summoned Sakura to Hong Kong. It turns out that this force is not a Clow Card at all, but the spirit of Soo Lin, a powerful fortune teller/magician who was imprisoned several hundred years ago in an alternate dimension. Of course, the one who sealed her away was none other than Clow Reed, the creator of the Clow Cards himself. To make things worse, Soo Lin had been in love with Reed, but her desire for power and her selfish use of magic made her too dangerous to leave running free. Can Sakura use the Clow Cards she possesses to free her friends from Soo Lin's grasp and somehow prevent her from running amok?

The thing that surprised me about *Cardcaptors: The Movie* was that it didn't feel like it had been massively butchered. When you watch the TV series, you can tell it's been mortally wounded, but the movie looks like it made it through intact. There are things in the movie, little things mind you, that make it seem like a more mature approach to the translation was used. It's now apparent that Sakura has a crush on Julian, something that wasn't made apparent in the TV episodes, and the issues of love and duty are handled nicely, rather than being skirted. The one thing that impressed me most of all was that Sakura and Kero had to tell Soo Lin that Clow Reed had died long ago. That's right, an animated character had to say the word "dead." This may seem trivial, and I shouldn't have to be wowed by this, but I was. It looks like the translators realized that the target audience could actually handle their heroine talking about death. It's about time....

Cardcaptors: The Movie is a solid offering with good comedy, some action and even (Heaven forbid!) a good little plot thrown in. Even if you've never seen the series, it's not hard to figure out what's going on. If you're a parent, and your children are bugging you to see the movie, you won't regret it. There's no toilet humor, hyperactivity or unneeded attitude, nor is there an obvious marketing/merchandising angle. If you're an anime fan, then you can take heart in the fact that the movie is more or less intact. *Cardcaptors: The Movie* may not be everyone's cup of tea, it could serve as an excellent introduction to anime for a wide audience, and for that alone, it gets two thumbs up from me.

DVD FEATURES: A theatrical release in Japan, *Cardcaptors: The Movie* is available as an English VHS (4:3 Ratio, Pan & Scan) and an English DVD (2.0 Audio, 4:3 Ratio, Pan & Scan) with extras (Froggy Mix Music Video, Theatrical Trailer). This film is also available completely uncut as *Cardcaptor Sakura: The Movie* on a Japanese-language DVD with English subtitles.

ADAM REHORN



Pioneer/Nelvana • English VHS/DVD • 86 mins. • US\$14.98/\$19.98 • PD11744 (VHS)/PV1828 (DVD)
Not shown on TV; based on the manga by CLAMP available in English from TOKYOPOP

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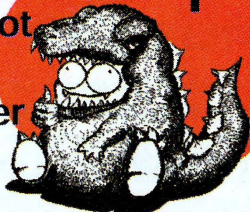
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DR. BROWN'S Game Crisis



DON'T THROW YOUR GAMEBOY ADVANCE IN THE TRASH...JUST YET

Ready to throw your Gameboy Advance in the trash? Have you had enough of the crappy remakes of old Super Nintendo games that you have already played the fudge out of back when they were new? Sick of lame-brained half-assed movie tie-in games that suck worse than the sucky movies they are based on? Like anybody needed another game for that sappy *E.T.* movie, which jerked every possible tear from audiences back in the '80s and returns years later for more jerking action. Who wants to play a game about a deranged messiah-like alien who is discovered, performs a number of miracles, dies, is reborn, and then ascends to the heavens?

Are you as tired as I am of playing the same damn hit game over and over on every console? I once truly loved *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* and spent hours playing it on my Dreamcast. Then some more hours on the PS2, a few more hours on the Xbox, and for several hours longer on the GBA and now I don't ever think I will play a skateboarding game again.

It's bad enough that I had to get used to the feeling that I am losing my eyesight every time I play the GBA because of its ridiculously poor internal lighting, but there is a severe lack of games worth a damn available in the States right now. Not to mention the games cost around US\$40 each and with that kind of price tag I am not taking my chances on buying a mediocre game that I might have enjoyed years ago when 16 bits were all we had.

But there is hope. The best thing about Nintendo as a company is that it's not obsessed with stopping people from playing import games on their systems. In fact they make it very easy. The GameCube can be modified quite easily, with an extremely modest cost, and with little technical skill. The GameBoy Advance is universal, meaning it needs nothing to play import games. So if you're tough enough to take on some *kanji* then you can buy any import game you want and start swinging!

The Japanese video game market is far more diversified and hardcore than the American one and the number of games made in Japan versus here is also dramatically higher. One reason for this difference is that the game industry in Japan is closely linked with other media like manga and anime, which are relatively new in the States. A large percentage of games in Japan come from a hit manga or anime series and if the series is not known outside of Japan, most companies won't bother bringing the game to the States because there is no guarantee for sales. This means what's available domestically might not look too enticing but there is hope in the import market, especially in the RPG genre, as there are some *incredible* games and with nothing stopping you from playing them on your U.S. Gameboy Advance except a lack of knowledge and a (most understandable) fear of spending 40+ dollars on an unknown game that could suck like a fat kid on a Slurpee. So don't waste your money on unknown import Gameboy Advance games without reading this.



Black Black



Super Robot Ponkotto



© HUDSON SOFT 2001
© 1998 RED

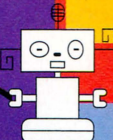
MY-T ANIME GAME RATINGS:

IS THIS ON?

A MILD CHARGE

STIMULATING

SHOCKINGLY GOOD!



GAMES YOU WANT

Cool-cool game called *Black Black* from Capcom. This game is a funky little RPG in which players must help other characters in order to enhance their skills. Their compatibility with the other characters in the game is a key factor in determining their own capabilities. (There is no word on a U.S. release at this point.) It starts out with fruity little enchanted music and magical little fairy critters sitting amidst a shady forest knoll when a whack old man on a skateboard crashes into the scene, picks his nose, and shouts "HEY!" Suddenly the cheery little gnome music is replaced by an off-the-wall funky hip-hop track, then your character, a little girl, goes into a long conversation with the crazy old man and eventually he instructs you to go into the next room where there is a staircase going down into the frozen maze that lies underneath the house. What's even more odd is that someone has left several treasure chests in this maze and you need to find them. You can guess what is next—turn-based combat! Against bright blue cute little birds that are out to get you and must be slain all to the tune of wacky lollipop combat music. Strange game but dynamite graphics, *Black Black* will make you see the potential of the Gameboy Advance, with its sharp, colorful textures that are crisp, sprite-based, and beautiful. Once again, Capcom proves to be the top dog in cross-platform developing, making every damn game look good no matter what the console.

Another profound little RPG to check out if you can handle the Japanese text is *Super Robot Ponkotto*. This is a stellar game that has an unrivaled soundtrack full of the quirkiest catchiest music I have ever heard. This game is similar to *Pokémon* in that you battle robots and capture them or parts of them to use in the construction of your own robot fighters. The game has fully customizable robots that you can build and fight against other players. There are also several mini games which are multi-player and four people can join in and compete against each other with the robots they have built. The release date for these games being brought to the States by Atlus is 15 June. The format is the standard sprite-based RPG-style adventure similar to the classic 16-bit RPGs of the Super Nintendo but with slightly better graphics. There are two versions of this game, one called Ring and the other Cross.

The third import RPG that was worth a dang was one called *Estopolis Gaiden: Chinmoko no Iseki*. This series is known to most U.S. gamers as *Lufia* and takes place between the first and second *Estopolis* stories. The game (rumors suggest it may be released domestically through Altus around 15

REVIEWS AV INTERFACE

GameCrisis

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 61



Estopolis Gaiden

September) will come with some special features like allowing four players to link together and explore certain areas. Its domestic release will probably be named something to the extent of *Lufia: In the Sacred Ruins*. This is the best-looking of the bunch and you'll notice right off the bat that there is an absurd amount of detail in this game. Every tile on every roof is meticulously detailed and vividly colored with an impressionist's passion. It's nice to see someone taking advantage of the GBA's graphic potential. Hopefully other companies will be inspired by this game. As for playing these games, they all are heavy on the text because they are RPGs so unless you read a lot of Japanese you're going to have a bit of a problem at times. *Estopolis Gaiden* most likely won't give you as much trouble as *Robot Ponkotto* Ring version, but it's slightly more complex than *Black Black*.

So that's about the size of it—don't throw your GBA in the trash just yet because I know it is tempting with the current U.S. game selection not to mention the shamefully low visibility of the system itself. Hold on to it for a little longer, as reinforcements from Japan are on the way—and if you can't wait, playing imports is always an option. Good luck either way.

NEXT MONTH: E3 is getting Brownded this year again with the help of the ever-lasting knob-stopper—Chris Kohler. Together we will stop at nothing to make sure you find out what is really going on at this event and not the usual bunch of regurgitated hype most magazines print about the next big thing because who gives a squirrel's nuts what you can play in 2003 when it's still 2002? No hype, just the facts, figures, and another word that starts with the letter "F." (Chris Kohler will have to come up with the last word as I can't think of anything and he's involved in this as well)

I'm going to bone-out and hook up with you next month. ★



COLUMNS CROWN & PUYO POP

Even though I love complex RPGs like *Final Fantasy IV* on the Wonderswan or *Golden Sun* on the Game Boy Advance, there's no denying that portable gaming systems are better suited to puzzle games. *Tetris* pushed Game Boy sales into the stratosphere, not the other way around. Puzzle games can be addictive, easy to learn, and playable in short bursts with little long-term attention required—qualities that make them a perfect match for the on-the-go nature of the Game Boy Advance. And the GBA's puzzler library just became two stronger thanks to the unique licensing agreement between Sega and THQ. (Of all parties involved, THQ wins because the Sega titles are invariably going to be better than their other recent portable games. *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* *Rugrats In Paris?* Please.)

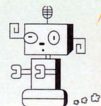
You're probably more familiar with *Columns Crown*, the successor to the sort-of-like-*Tetris*-but-not-really game that made Game Gear owners somewhat happy with their purchase back in 1990. *Columns* was designed to show off the fact that Sega's Game Gear had a color screen, so rather than making solid black lines of blocks, you had to match up the differently colored gems. The gameplay hasn't advanced much beyond that original incarnation, although the extensive single-player mode, with a few different variations like Survival and VS. mode, is a plus. Otherwise, *Columns Crown* is a solid version of a rather dated game.

And then there's *Puyo Pop*, the latest in the system-spanning *Puyo Puyo* series. If you've played *Kirby's Avalanche* on the SNES or *Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine* on the Genesis, you've played *Puyo Puyo*. It is difficult to overstate how popular the *Puyo* games are in Japan; practically every console has one or more. So why is it that practically none of them have ever made it to the U.S.? No idea, but let's be happy that it's here. Of all the different *Tetris* knockoffs where multicolored crap falls from the top of the screen, *Puyo* is king. It's a battle game, which means that you've got to not only keep your side of the screen from filling but also set up chain-reactions of your little Puyo blocks to "attack" the opponent. Chain reactions are easy to learn, and the single-player game does an excellent job of training you gradually. Another benefit of *Puyo*'s one-player mode are the strange and hilarious conversations between Arle, your character, and the many crazy opponents she comes across.

Both are well-made games, but the *Puyo* series wins hands-down here. US\$39.99 is a little expensive, but if either is worth the dough, it's *Puyo Pop*.



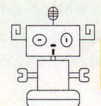
Same as it ever was... same as it ever was...



Rating for Columns Crown:



Hey look! A Tetris knock-off that's fun!



Rating for Puyo Pop:



CHRIS KOHLER

FATAL FRAME

The genre of survival horror has seen a rapid proliferation of titles since its rough polygonal predecessors first breathed life into the style. Games like *Silent Hill 2* and *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X* do well to improve the experience through graphical and design upgrades but genuinely do not offer much originality. With experience they find more annoying ways to limit ammo and game save opportunities without addressing camera angle aggravations. Tecmo (*Dead or Alive* series, *Ninja Gaiden*) adds some great new ideas for the genre with *Fatal Frame*, its first offering in survival horror.

You take on the plight of Miku, a girl investigating the disappearance of her brother Mafuyu at Himura Mansion. Once the host to many occult Shinto rituals, the mansion serves as a prison to murdered children and lost souls unable to free themselves from their earthly bindings. Rather than wielding pistols and shotguns, you are armed with a mystical camera able to capture the lonesome souls and free them from the mansion. Scraps of notebooks and photographs found along bloody hallways recount the fate of the previous set of investigators. After seeing the ethereal rope maiden, each person sees visions of himself or herself bound from each leg and arm and finally the neck as death was imminent. Thick ropes hang from the ceiling of the hallway near the front entrance as bitter greeting to any visitor foolish enough to enter. Ghosts draw our heroine back in history to the time of their deaths as they both desire her life force and seek her aid in reconciling their hellish end in the occult rituals.

Graphics, sound, and design manifest in a cabal of fear. The results of Tecmo's expertise are terrifying without being heavy-handed. Its designers make everything quiet, sensitive, and suggestive like when you are trying to sleep as a child. Your eyes try to make out shapes in the dark, and in doing so you see a grainy movement over all your vision. Sounds are distant and indistinct. Your heartbeat is louder than the approaching footsteps, and felt in the vibrations of your controller. The flashlight catches a hint of something for a second; your heartbeat elevates. Miku's sixth sense tells that something is coming. You raise the camera and look for the apparition hunting you.

Using a camera as a main weapon adds to the sensitivity of the horror. You aren't running around blasting shotguns at whatever jumps through the window. Miku is not a badass accompanied by a loud orchestral score. The camera provides a creepy first person view of the environment, available at any time. As a ghost approaches, fading in and out and darting about, you gather power by aiming before taking your shot.

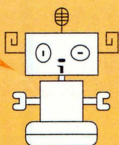
Tecmo is known for bringing some interesting ideas to established genres. By skillfully preparing, aiming, and timing your shots you gain experience points to unlock upgrades in camera performance and special game features (secret costumes!). Ghosts can withstand several photographs until your skill level improves in this interesting battle system that always maintains its appeal. All elements make this a prime example of what survival horror should aspire to be as something more than a subgenre of action.

The strangest element in this game comes scribbled under its title, "Based on a True Story." While it might evoke images of aged actors in a sensationalized FOX movie, Makoto Shibata, chief producer of *Fatal Frame*, explained the source of the mystery, "In an area outside Tokyo, there lies a mansion in which it's said seven people were murdered in a grisly manner. On the same property, there lie three detached residences that surround the mansion, all of which are rumored to have ties to the mansion's troubled past. It's said there is an underground network of tunnels that lay beneath the premises, but nobody knows who made these tunnels or what purpose they served. Many inexplicable phenomena have been reported occurring on the property. Bloody handprints have been found splattered all over the walls. Spirits have been spotted on the premises... even in broad daylight. A narrow stairway leads to an attic where a spirit-sealed talisman is rumored to be locked away. Men have sought this talisman, only to be found later with their bodies broken and rope marks around their wrists. There's a crumbling old statue of a woman in a kimono, but its head is missing. If you take a photo of a certain window, a young girl can be seen in the developed picture. These incidents have provoked fear in the people of Tokyo, and many believe that those who live near this area will become cursed. The deaths of those seven people are unexplained to this day."

SEAN MCCOY

Holy heebie jeebies!
This game is a creepy
screamfest of fun!

Rating:



AV

CD

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4

While other 3D fighting game series have evolved over the past few years, gaining more characters and better graphics with each new sequel, *Virtua Fighter* has had sort of a long bumpy road on its way to reaching No. 4. The first *VF* was the first 3D fighter ever and it rocked the arcades worldwide. The next was much improved and added two new characters. The third was a turd and I wasted 50 bucks buying it like a fool. The time between numbers 2 and 3 was far too long and right before 3 came out *Soul Caliber 2* was released and made it look bad...really bad. Like a two-hour-long-special-*Starsky & Hutch*-TV-reunion-sponsored-by-Coors-Light bad. So after number 3 sucked and other games like *Tekken 3*, *Dead or Alive 3*, *Soul Caliber 2*, *Guilty Gear X* and a variety of other hits and misses hit the streets, it was easy enough to forget about the series that started it all, which had dropped the ball.

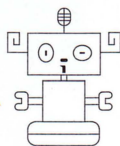
Well, somebody at Sega bent over and picked that ball back up and fought the traffic, smelled the cup, and went after it with *Virtua Fighter 4* for the PS2. What could they do to bring back the glory to the game? First off, the graphics are upgraded and look smart. The developers took full advantage of the PS2's superb lighting abilities and used them to achieve a higher level of graphic realism than any other console fighting game to date. In keeping with their practice of adding two new characters per sequel, this game introduces a tough-looking commando woman named Vanessa (who bears a striking resemblance to the X-Men's Storm) and a Shaolin monk called Lei. Both are excellent additions to the family and have distinctly different fighting styles.

That is the area in which *Virtua Fighter* as a game has an advantage over other fighting games: The fact that the characters look like real people and the accuracy of their individual fighting styles. It's not just a bunch of made-up kung-foolery. Many of the moves are actually based on real martial arts techniques. There are some liberties taken, but nothing is totally absurd. Reality is stretched just enough to make the experience enjoyable. The fighting engine has been fine-tuned, making it tighter by making the moves easier to execute without altering it to the point where players might feel disoriented and have to relearn how to play the game. All in all, it is a dang good game, especially if you like *Tekken 4* but scoff at the Chex-mix-like variety of fighters (a bear, a 'bot, and some log dude?) or get tired of the boring "clone-wars" mix found in most *Street Fighter* and SNK games—a big roster of copycat characters mostly comprised of subtle variations of each other. (Ryu is like Ken, who is like Dan, who is similar to Akuma, and he fights like Sagat, who is a variation of Retsu—and his moves are basically the same as so-and-so—blah, blah, etc., etc.) *Virtua Fighter 4*'s roster of plausible characters is often an overlooked quality of the game.

In terms of believable combat, *VF4* definitely comes out on top. No laser-beam breath, rocket-powered jet kicks, super-deluxe-model jumbo-mumbo, fourth-dimensional hyperdrive, insanity combos, or final execution dragon uppercut punches either, just complex kung fu fighting with an intricate combat engine allowing for a variety of fighting scenarios topped off with cutting-edge graphics and a sleek interface.

My only complaint is the butt-rocking soundtrack. This game would have greatly benefited from some sinister-sounding techno, trance, or ambient instead of ear-splitting hot licks that sound like they were squeezed out of a lead guitarist from some kind of Ted Nugent's survivalists' band. An extra bonus includes laughing at the wacky incredibly imaginative things said by winners of each match, like Jeffrey's haunting taunt "It seems to me I've won!" or Hawk's menacing advice: "Go back to school!"

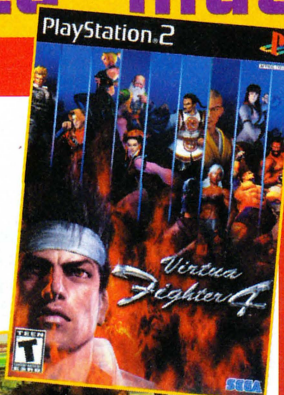
AWESOME!
VF4 is back on top of the heap!



Rating:



DR. BROWN



SLAYERS GREAT

THE MOTION PICTURE ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK



Megumi Hayashibara once again has a chance to flex her vocal muscle with a pair of tracks of J-techno: the infectious "Reflections," the movie's theme song, and its single b-side "Gloria." But her fans are better off getting the single (King Records KIDA-154). The remaining 20 minutes—yes, this disc is quite short—are spectacularly nondescript. Even as a fan of *The Slayers*, not to mention movie soundtracks in general, there is little to satisfy. Pedestrian orchestral movements and lightweight jazz will convince that you only bought the darn CD because Lina and Nahga are on the cover. Although it does come with a foldout mini poster of the covert art. Only track 9 pricked up my ears, but solely because it's an island in a sea of mediocrity. For the more comedic moments, there is the oom-pah-pah of circus music; for the serious, somber bassoon strains offer the only respite from slapping your forehead and wondering why you didn't pick up the soundtrack for *Slayers Premium* instead. Megumi sings on that one too.

KEITH DAWSON

JET SET RADIO FUTURE

© SEGA © Smilebit/SEGA, 2002



The city is again your canvas in *Jet Set Radio Future*, the upgraded sequel to the groundbreaking *Jet Grind Radio*. In a futuristic version of Tokyo, rival skater gangs battle over tagging turf while eluding the absurd lengths to which the law will go to stop their juvenile delinquency. The driving beat behind the action is the pirate radio station Jet Set Radio, led by the grand Professor K. With dreadlocks thumping, the Professor spins the game's impressive soundtrack—hip-hop, experimental Japanese techno, bubblegum techno and rap to keep you in the groove. Armed with powered inline skates, spray cans, and true attitude, *JSRF* continues to deliver all that its predecessor promised and more.

Rival skaters aren't your only problems. Tokyo is being oppressed by Rokkaku Gouji and his "Rokkaku Law." He is using money and influence to buy his way into City Hall and ruin everything: industry, society, and culture. You and your gang are keeping the spirit of the city alive one misunderstood work of art at a time against his corporate goon squads. They are well equipped: spider robots, tanks, missile launchers and more, but your posse of street-smart skaters has all the half-pipe and grinding skills necessary to take them down.

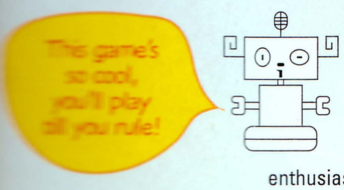
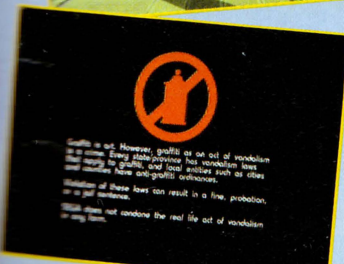
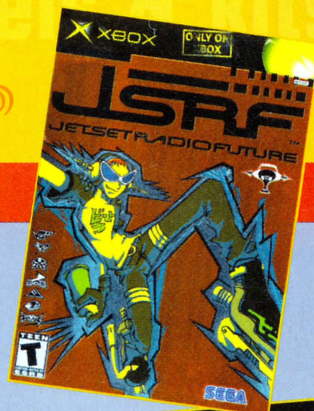
The gameplay of *JSRF* retains all the expressive chaotic freedom of the original while adding a few tricks for good measure. Movement is very intuitive and easy to control. Though physics bear little reality, they are consistent and yielding to enjoyable gameplay. The *Street Fighter*-style tagging movements are a thing of the past. Combat with the law has been upgraded in both difficulty and enjoyment. With no time limit you are free to explore more expansive levels with secrets and grinding opportunities unthinkable on the original. Graphics are enhanced with motion blur, anti-aliasing, and fog for even better cel-shaded effects.

Perhaps the most significant improvement is the addition of a 1- to 4-player multiplayer mode with its own host of party-style games. As a matter of course, any console game suffers from split-screen modes, but the cel-shading and brightly designed environments do very well to overcome the common shortcomings. Mini-games such as tagging the other players and capture the flag make this a must own for anyone who enjoyed *Super Monkey Ball* and similar titles.

Because the graffiti has been simplified, you'll find that the challenge lies in finding your way to the tag spot rather than avoiding the law. This allows a greater speed to everything—you can't expect to be doing joystick movements while grinding a corkscrew at breakneck speeds. The level designs, past the familiar first few, embrace this new speed and challenge. You'll find yourself jumping from satellite dishes to billboards between skyscrapers with no time to hesitate before landing on a girder heading to who knows where. The sewers are remarkable in their twisting pipes and corkscrews (think the climax of *Monsters Inc.*) and Sky-Dinosaurian Park has you grinding along lofty roller coaster tracks with prehistoric themes.

The difficulty level remains high and invigorating throughout the story. Levels are designed so well that there will always be just enough of a hint to guide you forward without giving much away. Many later levels require mastery of special half-pipe and grinding skills just to complete the mission, all the while asking more of you should you want to obtain the hidden Graffiti Souls to unlock new tags. There are also confusing challenges listed on your mission description, such as "Platform of '#' x 13, not to fall down" which means you need to grind on 13 marked platforms without falling down to unlock a secret. Others are more absurd. By completing these and other challenges you can unlock 24 total characters with varied skills and attitudes.

JSRF exhibits an indie obscura soundtrack mixed by the Latch Brothers and Hideki Naganuma, including the mesmeric "Birthday Cake" by Cibo Matto. All sound effects and music are presented in Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound to add more immersing qualities to an excellent game that is a must for any game



SEAN MCCOY

GRAFFITI ROLLERBLADING • SEGA • DOMESTIC U.S. • US\$49.99

REVIEWS AV INTERFACE

AV

GRANDIA II

The *Grandia* series has met much critical acclaim but it has never really hit home with American gamers in a big way. The first *Grandia* was for the Sega Saturn, which died in the States, and so did the game's popularity until it manifested over a year later on the PS1. Although the game sports an impressive amount of smartly designed environments filled to the gills with all kinds of knick-knacks, doo-dads, and rinky-dinkles, making every room look truly lived-in, the main characters were too childlike and in the first segment of the game, players were required to go find a bunch of silly things like frying pans and vegetable strainers. This, combined with the irritating nature of the main characters, made playing the game difficult in spite of the amazing explorable environments.

So *Grandia II* was released for the soon-to-be defunct Dreamcast and, due to the platform's demise, the game never got the recognition I thought it deserved. When *Grandia II* came out on the DC it was the best-looking console RPG available. GameArts had scrapped the annoying kids from the first game and replaced them with slightly less annoying adult characters. The game was amazing and I thought RPGs just couldn't get much better. Then I played *Final Fantasy X*. It's the kind of game that makes every game ever made look bad. I mean, why even make any more video games after a game like that? So when I popped in *Grandia II* for the PS2 I was ready to be impressed, but all that happened was it looked like a dirty diaper compared to the incredible graphics and intense storyline in *FFX*. It couldn't compete story-wise, graphically, and certainly not in sound as the blond-haired Leonardo DiCaprio-clone main character in *FFX* says in an irritating whiny, wimpy-ass voice, "Gimme a break!" for the 15th time in an hour).

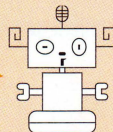
So should everybody just ignore *Grandia II* and play *FFX*? Hell, no! Have you noticed while playing *FFX* that the battles look well-rendered but not well-thought-out? That's because the same tired old RPG turn-based fighting formula is in effect, and I hate to make fans of this insanely popular series mad, but it looks silly when three people line up and three monsters line up, and then hop back and forth doing damage then wait their turn to do it again. Sorry, but I said it and stand by it—it looks dumb. In fact, as much as I love *FFX*, the entire fighting system needs to be scrapped and remade.

That is where *Grandia* beats the pants off of *FFX*. The fighting system in *Grandia II* is still turn-based, but not rigid. Each character or monster attacks, and then moves to a different area. And you don't have to attack if you're about to be clobbered—you can block at the last minute, which pushes your attack timing meter up ahead to ensure you'll get a chance to strike soon. If you don't want to attack or defend, you can evade and choose the area you want to run to. If you're about to be hit and one of your characters' attack turn comes up, you can choose the critical strike, which does less damage but counters the monster's attack and pushes his attack timing meter back. It is truly a brilliant system that is unrivaled in the world of RPGs. You will not find a more logical, flexible, manageable, and most of all *engaging* battle system on any RPG. This is what *all* turn-based combat sequences should adopt as their fighting system—it makes the fights so good who *cares* about the story? Plus, every character is fully upgradeable as are many of their weapons and artifacts. It's similar to *FFX*'s Node system but much, much less mind boggling.

A game as great as *FFX* could learn a lot from *Grandia II* and hopefully will, but until that time comes I recommend picking this game up just so you can experience turn-based combat perfection. But be warned: it makes *FFX* fights seem dumb.

DR. BROWN

It's not too cutesy, it's got a great fighting system, and it's FUN! What more do you want?!



Rating:



PS2 • RPG • GAME ARTS/UBI SOFT • DOMESTIC U.S. • US\$49.99

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YOUR directions...***



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REVIEWS • AV INTERFACE •

AV

YU-GI-OH! FORBIDDEN MEMORIES AND YU-GI-OH! DARK DUEL STORIES

It's the game that had kids going 'nanners in Japan after the last Pokémon died alone and unloved in the middle of a deserted street. In Japan, there is a kind of consumer fanaticism that propels children from one fad to the next in a never-ending cycle of desire for what the current "big thing" is. In the States there is a similar quality in kids and adults, but not quite as intense, and after one fad dies out another does not instantly take its place. Of course, something is always going to be popular with children, and what that thing is changes with each generation. New technological gadgets are created and older fads return for no apparent reason. The popularity of yo-yos, like the toy itself, goes up and down again and again, popping in and out of favor with kids throughout the decades. Other toys maintain their popularity and never seem to go away, like Barbie™.

This dynamic is essentially the same in both Japan and the States, but boggling most of the world was the insane popularity that *Pokémon* achieved worldwide. To be a crazy fad in Japan is not that amazing as they have a hard-core consumer culture that feeds on trends. However when the big P hit big in *both* countries in much the same manner it got businessmen riled up and companies started to wonder just how similar kids are in the U.S. and Japan. More importantly, it planted a seed in many people's minds that it's possible to make money in both markets if the product is good enough.

So does *Yu-Gi-Oh!* have what it takes to make kids in both countries go nuts? That's a good question. There are many elements that *Yu-Gi-Oh!* has that make it similar to *Pokémon*. For instance, the collectability factor—some *Yu-Gi-Oh!* cards are very rare and thus more valuable. There is a social aspect similar to *Pokémon*—the card game can be taken anywhere and played against anybody who has their own deck. In both games, there's an abundance of cards representing different types of monsters, which means more people can participate—with so many types, there is a good chance at least a few will appeal to any gamer.

The monsters on the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* cards aren't typically cute—they are much darker and scarier. The sheer variety of monsters is staggering. It seems like there is no end to them. In the video games, most of the monsters can be fused together to create newer and more powerful beasts. In fact, in the PlayStation 1 game, *Yu-Gi-Oh! Forbidden Memories*, is a crucial factor to winning or losing each match. If you're not good at it, you'll go down fast. You would think a game made for kids would be somewhat forgiving but in several parts of the game if you lose one duel, the game is over. This I found to be frustrating because the game doesn't come with a tutorial mode, which means you learn while you burn and the computer isn't always nice. Basically, if you don't have some kind of monster card-mixing chart to tell you what monsters do and don't mix, you're doomed.

The graphics are about as good as they can be for playing a dang card game and the interface is functional. There is some story about ancient Egypt and someone stealing some vague ultimate power versus an ancient puzzle artifact that ends up sending you years into the future and you now have to compete against other duelists in a final competition.

Although the game has a lot going for it, the lack of a tutorial mode made playing interesting only for the sake of trying to figure out how. Once I got a grip on the system, I would start having fun and suddenly lose one duel only to have to start over. No Continue option either—just a cold unfriendly Game Over screen...not very encouraging.

However, the experience with the Gameboy Color game called *Yu-Gi-Oh! Dark Duel Stories* was quite different and in fact, I would have to admit I enjoyed playing it more than the PS1 game. The combat system is more flexible in *Dark Duel Stories* and I liked being given as many chances as I wanted to win cards and increase my deck size as well as construct special powerful monsters. The concept of mixing cards in *Dark Duel* is still important but it isn't as crucial as it is in *Forbidden Memories*. The strategy used in *Yu-Gi-Oh!* is partially based on luck, knowledge of your cards, and having a good deck to start with. Not all the cards are monsters—some cast spells that enhance specific types of monsters or destroy your opponents. When no monsters are in your front row to protect you, you take the damage, and when your 8 hit points are gone, you lose the battle. I can see the game's appeal, especially in light of how popular other card games have been, like *Magic the Gathering*. Another advantage this game has is its sense of design, which is darker and more sophisticated than *Pokémon* and should appeal to a slightly older demographic. There is definitely potential here, and playing the video games has made me want to try out the cards for real.

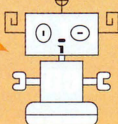
As for the video games, I prefer the GBC version to the PS1 for two reasons. One: it allows you to manage your deck more and construct new, more powerful monsters. Two: If you're going to play a card game, it might as well be on a Gameboy because playing this game on a PS2 seems like a big waste of power because of the graphically simplistic nature of the game. If you enjoy card games of depth like *Magic the Gathering* or are seriously into fantasy, these games could make you go 'nanners as well.

Dark Duel Stories Rating:

DR. BROWN



If you're a *Magic the Gathering* fan, you'll enjoy these games!



Forbidden Memories Rating:



YU-GI-OH DARK DUEL STORIES: GAMEBOY COLOR • PUZZLE CARD BATTLE • KONAMI • DOMESTIC U.S. • US\$29.99

YU-GI-OH FORBIDDEN MEMORIES: PS1 • KONAMI • PUZZLE CARD BATTLE • DOMESTIC U.S. • US\$29.99

CD



AN CINNIÚINT (TSUGUNAI OST) SLEIGH BELLS



It's time to correct a long-standing error: it was me, not David Riddick, who wrote the *Chrono Cross* soundtrack review in a previous volume of *ANIMERICA*. (Don't worry, they paid the right guy.) I wanted to write that review to profess to the world my love for Yasunori Mitsuda's soundtracks, and now I've got another chance.

Mitsuda got his start with the OST for the Super NES hit *Chrono Trigger*—although the more recognizable Nobuo Uematsu, who helped out on a few tracks, was given top billing. Mitsuda's recent fame comes from his soundtracks for Nintendo's *Mario Party* games and Squaresoft's *Xenogears* and *Chrono Cross*. The latter two games featured his now-signature Celtic style—*Xenogears* in particular features such talented Irish musicians as Davy Spillane (*Riverdance*, Enya's *Watermark*) and Máire Bhreathnach (*Lord of the Dance*, *Feet of Flames*).

Early this year, he self-published the soundtrack to the little-known PlayStation2 title *Tsugunai*. By all accounts the game wasn't anything special, but Mitsuda fans will love *An Cinniúint*. It's not as heavily Celtic-influenced as his earlier work, but the fantastic fiddles and flutes are still there, and the overall quality of the tracks is high. The only problem is that, because the CD is not available in stores, you have to order it off of Mitsuda's personal website, <http://www.procyon-studio.com>. Luckily, they not only accept orders from overseas, but they have an English site as well. Mitsuda fans, go forth and order!

CHRIS KOHLER

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SBPS 0001~2 • ¥2,700 (APPROX. US\$21)

KIT

ADAM REHORN'S

MECHWORKS

MECHA MASQUERADE? MASKING THE TRUTH! P.1

Last time, I finished talking about priming, and how to combine your painting skills with the right primer to make even difficult colors work well. Now you know the differences between airbrushing and hand brushing, the properties of oil and acrylic paints, and how to apply them effectively. There is one other major painting-related skill that I should pass on at this point, and that is the skill of masking.

Masking is a way of protecting finished pieces from the dangers of modeling. In many kits, it is necessary to complete some assemblies totally, and then build the next assembly around them. For long-time readers of this column, or my model reviews, you will recognize this problem as "build-around." This is a particularly nasty phenomenon, and one that is more prevalent in mecha than in most other types of models.

Build-around is usually encountered in older kits, and usually involves the lower leg building around the feet and upper legs, and the lower arms and shoulder flares building around the upper arms. (It can also happen on heads, where faces are a separate piece, but that is a different matter, and I'll get to it later.) Thankfully, it is usually pretty easy to mask these areas off, although masking is always a pain in the posterior.

The best material to use for masking is—no shock here—masking tape! That's why it's called that in the first place. Some people I know will mask the piece that will be built around before actually building around it. I have tried it, but I have found it doesn't work all that well, and the masking tape can be difficult to get off when you're finished. However, this method does give extremely good protection.

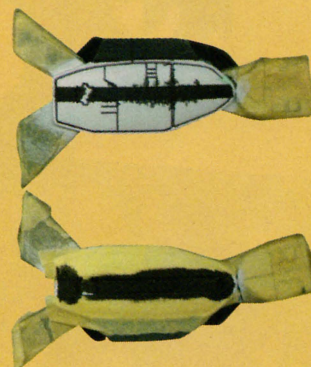
What I do is build the assembly in question, and let the glue dry. I then use many small pieces of masking tape to cover the completed pieces. Small pieces are easier to maneuver than large ones, and masking tape, while flexible, doesn't curve well if the piece is too long. One thing you want to avoid is having gaps in your coverage, as it will completely negate the point of masking in the first place. The other thing that can bite you in the backside are creases. Try to make sure that any given piece is smooth, at least at the edge of the tape. If you aren't careful you can leave unintended "channels" for paint to slip through.

If this happens, you are basically dead. Your time in masking will have been wasted, and you will end up having to do some emergency paint repair work. That's why it is important to make sure your masking is PERFECT. Haste, in this case, really does make waste.

There's actually more to masking than this, and next time I'll finish off this topic with a few helpful hints to make the most of your masking, and to reduce the chances of unfortunate mishaps. See you then! ☆



This photo shows the leg of my 1/144 Queadluun Rau during production. The foot and upper leg are completely masked, both victims of build-around. You can see the paint slopped on the tape—good thing I masked, eh?



Well, not every masking job is perfect. I was a bit sloppy on masking this 1/100 Strike Valkyrie leg, and look where it got me. I masked off the foot and upper leg, and then used masking tape to outline the "stripe" on the leg. Obviously, I didn't do a good job: the leaked paint can be seen as "fuzzies" around the stripe. This will require hours of painstaking touch-up.

REVIEWS AV INTERFACE KIT



PATRICK MACIAS'
TOY BOY

Toy Boy illustration by James Boren

SEPARATED AT BIRTH?

RESIDENT EVIL and FINAL FANTASY X

Resident Evil and Final Fantasy. Are they twins destined for the "Separated at birth" bin? Sounds crazy at first, but think about it for a second. Okay, maybe how about a few more seconds? Nope? Well, just listen then.

Both *RE* and *FF* began life as popular video games that left the island-nation of Japan only to conquer the rest of the planet. Both recently went Hollywood to become feature films. Plus both keep pumping out the products and action figures like there is no tomorrow. Need some proof? Well, if you could see me now, you'd have to look hard because my work area is currently cluttered with zombies, mutant-women, bizarre weaponry, and 1/6 scale PVC. Sure that's nothing new for me, but now the yokels are culled from *Resident Evil* and *Final Fantasy X*! Where to begin and where does it end?

Probably with *Resident Evil* Series Two's eye-catching Zombie Cop, a sequel of sorts to Series One's much beloved (at least around the *ANIMERICA* office) Zombie Soldier. But this time, the molding, detail, and paint job on this poor victim of the dreaded G Virus is much improved. So is the poseability. Now pretty much every extremity can be moved around to create a maximum desired "undead" appearance. For example, a wonderful new joint has been added to imitate that *tres* fashionable "broken neck" look.

Move his arms or legs a little bit, and he's ready to direct traffic, do some tai-chi, or dance in a spectacular re-creation of Michael Jackson's epochal "Thriller" clip.

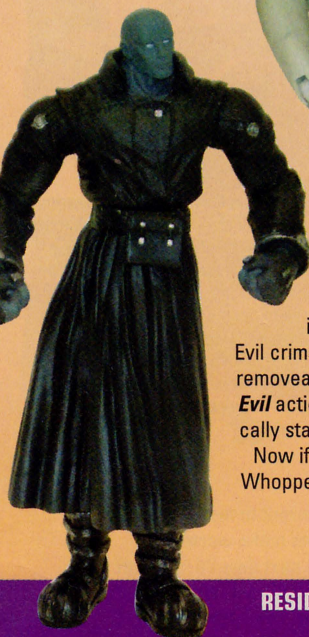
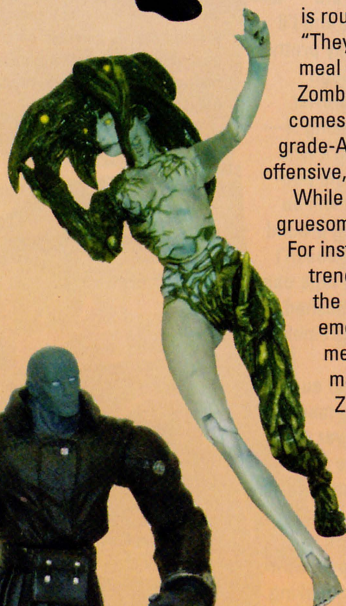
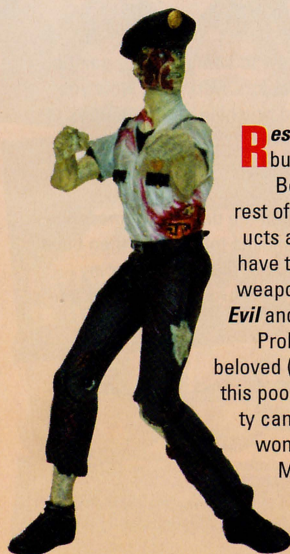
Even zombie movie neophytes know that the ear-splitting cry of "Brains!" is roughly equivalent to yelling "Supper!" to a bunch of hungry farm hands. To wit: "They comes a runnin'." Yet I don't think Zombie Cop is much interested in making a meal out of his brainy buddy Licker here, because just as Zombie Solider came with Zombie Dog, Zombie Cop (sounds an awful lot like a movie title...must investigate) also comes with a personal pal of his own. With his big nasty tongue Licker could make a grade-A employee in a mail office, but his spectacular unsavory, and ever-so-slightly offensive, appearance conspires to make him the action figure accessory of the year.

While the rest of the Series Two gang sorta fails to meet the high standards set by this gruesome twosome, there is still much to recommend on the new *Resident Evil* figure front. For instance, I'm very fond of genetically altered mystery man Mr. X, he of the rubber trenchcoat and giant hands. If there was a *Resident Evil* football team (and why not, after the movie?) this guy would make a fantastic linebacker. I'm not such a big fan of the emotionless facial sculpt on Claire Redfield, but she comes with a wonderful assortment of side arms including the ever-popular AK-47 and a Magnum .44 that would make Dirty Harry blush (and hey, where's his action figure anyway?). Aside from old Zombie Cop, Series Two's Alexia makes the strongest impression. A mutation victim since childhood (aren't we all?), her limbs can be detached and reconfigured, and she even comes with an alternate head and a batch of spare mutated limbs which makes for an embarrassment of riches.

Actually, my thumb and forefinger feel embarrassingly mutated as well, mostly from the 15 odd painful minutes. I've just spent freeing these *Final Fantasy X* figures from their packaging. Those little twisty wires on the back can really mess you up, you know? Once you've got them out and about, it's clear that these are quality products with paint job and sculpting in the upper echelons of what MC Hammer might

refer to as "proper." There's not a lot to do on the movement front here (lithe and lovely Tidus, for instance, can only twist her wrists), but they look fantastically accurate to their digital counterparts. Evil crimson-clad Auron may be the pick of the bunch. First of all, he's a big figure by 1/6 standards. He's got a removeable fist, a giant sword, and even a tiny pair of sunglasses to look cool in. Compared to the *Resident Evil* action force, there's not a lot of play value here per se, but the *Final Fantasy X* gang have "must buy" practically stamped on their foreheads for fanatical fans of the game.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to find the most conspiratorial comparisons between the Big Mac and the Whopper. Just watch me now...



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GODZILLA

Gyahl! Head for the hills! Godzilla, King of the Monsters is coming to attack the USA in Fall 2002 with a host of toys from Bandai. A new division of the famed toy company that brings the *Power Rangers* and *Gundam* goods to the USA, Bandai Creation will apparently be releasing a line of Zilla figures identical to Japanese items that have been hugely popular with importers and collectors for decades now. The difference is that the domestically packaged versions of the radioactive thunder lizard (and his pals such as Destroyah, Mothra, and Anguila to name only a few) will range in price from US\$5.99 to \$19.99 whereas previously you'd be asked to pay twice as much. Multiply this with the new Godzilla chess pieces and the resin statues from X-Plus USA, and it is almost enough to wash away the taste of that gawdawful Hollywood remake. Almost.



YU-GI-OH! 2" FIGURES

What have we here? From the "As Seen on TV" department, wacky little two-inch-tall versions of the King of Games, along with friends and foes alike, packaged with an almost hieroglyphic "holo-tile" display stand. Pretty cool for the "4+" crowd. Along with a pocket-sized Yugi, you can also pick up Blue Eyes White Dragon (sounds like a cocktail I had in Chinatown once), Exodia the Forbidden One, Dark Magician, Celtic Guardian, and Summoned Skull. You know the drill, "If it's Mattel, it's swell!" ☆



CD

EVANGELION DEATH



This is the soundtrack for the first *Evangeliion* movie, *Death*, with bonus tracks from *Rebirth*, the second movie. With booklet images of Rei on violin and Asuka on cello reinforcing the connection, these loosely joined bursts of solo instrumentation are more a collection of cues and stings, not music. Shiroh Sagisu's background music is fused with a pair of Bach tunes and two versions of Pachelbel's "Kanon D-dur," the first time we enter three-digit territory. Now there's a tune I've never heard in anime before. Hideaki Anno shows humor titling tracks like "Dvorak: Original Complete Version" (32 sec.) and "The Sorrow of Losing the Object of One's Dependence II," which is in fact, a laid-back instrumental version of "Fly Me to the Moon." Two bonus tracks fill the rest of the disc—Verdi's "Requiem" is a whopper at 37 minutes while the *Death* original soundtrack proper is a paltry 22 minutes. Something is seriously wrong when one bonus track takes up 60 percent of the space. Now, kids, can you say "filler"? Very good.



KEITH DAWE

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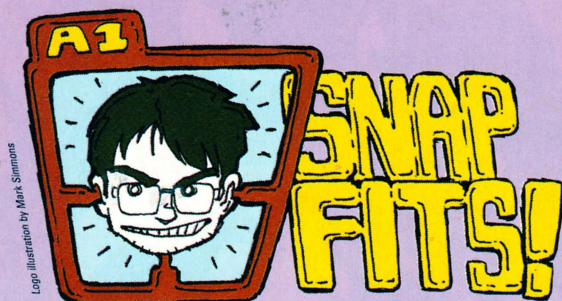
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CAN YOU POSE IT, CHANGE PARTS, ADD EXTRA EQUIPMENT?

- 1: NOTHING MORE THAN A DESK STATUE
- 2: MODEST MOVEMENT, FEW EXTRAS
- 3: FULLY ARTICULATED FIGURE WITH LOTS OF GADGET
- 4: SUPERHUMAN POSEABILITY AND COUNTLESS GIMMICKS



WITH MARK SIMMONS

In theory, designing scale model kits of giant robots should be relatively straightforward: Take the listed dimensions of the machine in question, reduce to the desired fraction, and get sculpting. However, for some reason, it doesn't always work out so smoothly. Bandai's High Grade Universal Century line of *Gundam* kits—many of which now populate U.S. store shelves courtesy of Bandai America—seems to have a particular problem with the scaling issue,* with many of the featured mobile suits standing at least a quarter-inch taller than they really ought to. This curious phenomenon explains why the HG-UC version of *Gundam 0083*'s elusive *Gundam GP03S* seems so tiny compared to its sibling GP01, let alone the original GP03S kit released ten years ago. It's not that it's too small, it's that the other kits are way too big.

The scale issue is especially important for the *Gundam GP03S*, since it also serves as part of the newly released HG-UC Dendrobium—a meter-long, ¥28,000 monstrosity that even your model-addled columnist can't justify bringing home. The last two incarnations of the infamous Dendrobium played it fast and loose with the proportions. The HG Mechanics kit, reviewed here eight months ago, features a faithfully sized 1/550 scale *Gundam* encased in a seriously oversized Dendrobium; the recent MS in Action toy goes to the other extreme by shrinking the Dendrobium around the *Gundam*. With the release of the HG-UC Dendrobium, the *Gundam* and its wrap-around battle machine are at last presented in their proper proportions. It's a landmark event for Dendrobium mavens, and maybe now we can all put this behind us and move on to something else.

Another issue in translating animated 'bots to model kit form is the proportions. In some cases, changes made by the model designers are definite improvements. Take the Qubeley, for instance: In adapting *Zeta Gundam*'s memorable adversary mobile suit for the HG-UC line, the Bandai crew made almost no changes to the details, but quietly shrank the original design's oversized forearms. The result was a lovely little kit, and now that it's been scaled up to 1/100 Master Grade size, it's a lovely big kit too.

Tinkering with the proportions can have its dark side, though. I grumbled about the proportions of the High Grade Heavy Metal L.Gaim a few months back, but with the second release in this '80s revival series, I think an actual rant may be in order. The sinister A-Taul has the same aesthetic flaws as the earlier L.Gaim. Disproportionately long legs extend down to oversized feet, throwing off the balance of the original design. Moreover, the elbow, knee, and ankle joints have almost no freedom of movement, making it hard to put this critter in anything more dynamic than a sullen standing-around pose. One bonus, though, for those who've been stockpiling their 1984-vintage L.Gaim models: By stripping parts out of your antique G-Roon, Ashura Temple, and Auge kits, you can adapt the new A-Taul into Maf Mctomin's crazy hybrid "A-Taul Five." Cute, but the kits themselves need more work if this L.Gaim revival is going to pay off.

* I suspect there may be some kind of mix-up between overall height and head height during the blueprint phase, but that's just a theory. ☆



1/144 SCALE HIGH GRADE

UNIVERSAL CENTURY GUNDAM GP03S

INFO: Snap-fit plastic model kit

FROM: Bandai

PRICE: ¥1,600

OVERALL HEIGHT: 5"

COMPLEXITY	DETAIL	PLAY VALUE
2	3	3

MARK SEZ: Relatively small, but lots of details and moving parts; yay for fold-out grappling claws, boo for loosely attached upper arms.

1/100 SCALE MASTER GRADE

AMX-004 QUBELEY

INFO: Snap-fit plastic model kit

FROM: Bandai

PRICE: ¥1,600

OVERALL HEIGHT: 8"

COMPLEXITY	DETAIL	PLAY VALUE
2	3	3

MARK SEZ: The HG-UC version writ large, with some perfunctory inner detailing and very cool movable fingers.



1/144 SCALE HIGH GRADE

HEAVY METAL A-TAUL

INFO: Snap-fit plastic model kit

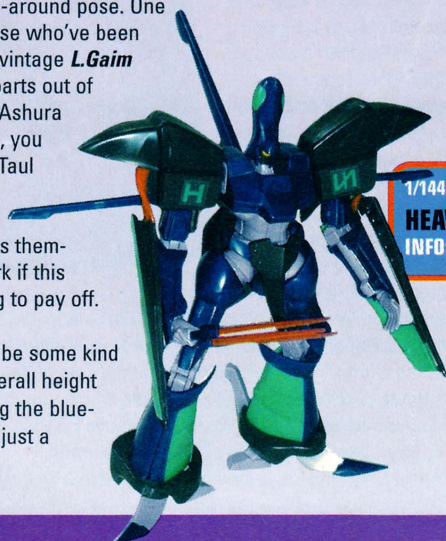
FROM: Bandai

PRICE: ¥1,500

OVERALL HEIGHT: 7"

COMPLEXITY	DETAIL	PLAY VALUE
2	2	2

MARK SEZ: An unusual 'bot in striking colors, but distorted proportions and poor poseability are unworthy of a modern kit.



ABOUT SNAP FITS

The world of mecha modeling harbors a dirty secret. Sure, these finely crafted kits give you an opportunity to show off your mastery of scale-modeling techniques.

With glue, paint, inked panel lines, and other enhancements, you can create a truly awe-inspiring display piece. But, on the other hand, you can simply clip out the pieces and snap them together. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Japan's modelmakers, modern robot kits can be assembled without glue and look great without paint, and an evening's effort yields a superposeable toy that blows any so-called "action figure" out of the water. Each month in this column, we check out the latest ingenious offerings—and celebrate the simple elegance of the prefab, snap-fit model kit.

REVIEWS BEST OF THE EAST

THE IMPORT REPORT

TV, video, movies...we can't wait to see what's next! Our staffers give you their straight-from-the-hip opinions in a first look at the freshest anime, straight from Japan.

FEATURED REVIEWERS



ANDY

ANDY NAKATANI's talked about it before, but he's finally done it this time! Despite Kelli's discouraging talk about never ever completely losing the desire to smoke, Andy has not smoked a cigarette in over two weeks! He *is* feeling withdrawal symptoms though—headache, sore throat, achy muscles, runny nose, fever.... No, wait a minute, maybe that's the cold he had last week....



URIAN

URIAN BROWN is still trying to figure out how they made those hobbits look so dang small in *The Lord of the Rings*. Waiting for the sequel is going to be hard but watching *Attack of the Clones* and *Spider-Man* in the meantime will make the wait a little easier. The word on the street is that there are going to be three *Spider-Man* movies and he is praying that the villain in the third is the all-powerful sinister master scavenger the Vulture, played by a bald Leonard Nimoy.



PATRICK

Whenever Assistant Editor PATRICK MACIAS needs a break from reality he either A) listens to the new CD by the 13 girl strong J-pop combo Morning Musume, B) guzzles a bright green glass of absinthe and whips out the tarot cards, or C) fondly remembers the day when Dr. Brown attacked his very own neither regions with a tape gun, declared himself "Sticky Butt 2000," and began uncontrollably bouncing on top of box filled with Styrofoam popcorn.



KELLI

These days KELLI BLACKWELL has been trying to get into the "zone." Running, weight lifting, yoga poses...and so far, nothing is working. Why does she torture herself? Well, the hundreds of swimsuit submissions for the fan art contest and those extra sexy ladies of anime have given Kelli a bit of a complex. Like the anorexic aerobic guru Jane Fonda once said, "No pain, no gain!!" Kelli gets away from this obsession by reading *Chobits* by the girls at CLAMP and giggles at the line, "Wow, I can't believe her breasts feel so soft." What a perv!



MAI

MAI ANIME™, seriously surly ward to Best of the West's Major Anime™ (and I'll bet you're wondering just why he's started to talk again after all this time, aren't you...and what's her relation to that blabbermouth robot?) has felt her eyes rolling back in her head so much lately from looking over the shoulders of the staffers arguing over which girls and guys are the beefiest beefcakes and cutiest cuties that she can barely think straight. Where's some good ol' Sunrise action to take that tension away?

THIS MONTH'S PICKS



MAZINKAISER



S.Cry.Ed

Turn the page and see what the crew thought of this month's selections!

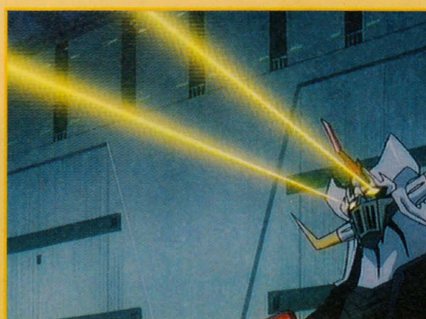
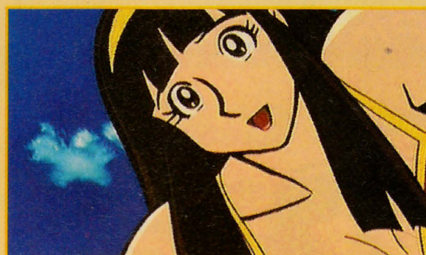
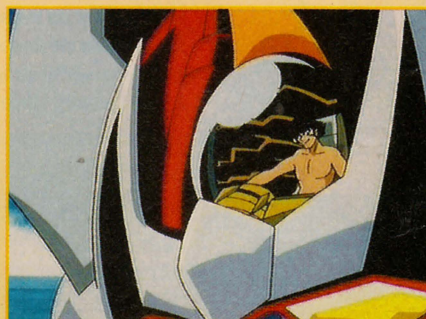
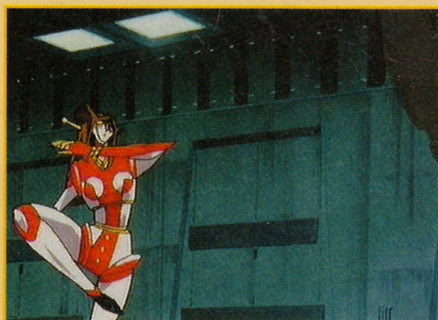
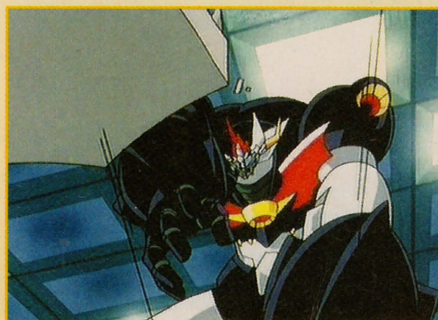
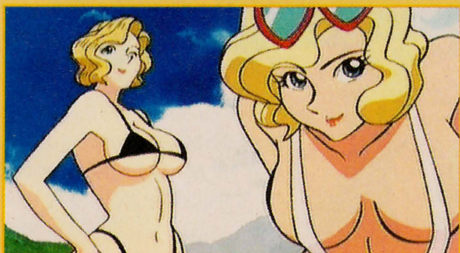
MAZINKAISER VOL. 4

2001-02 OAV series directed by **Masahiko Murata** (*Gensômaden Saiyuki*), Mazinger design by **Sato Keiichi** (*The Big O*, *SoulTaker*), and character designs by **Kenji Hayama** (*SoulTaker*, *Getter Robo Armageddon*)

Go Nagai, go! *Mazinkaiser* is the first *Mazinger* series to be created in over 25 years. In case you didn't already know, Go Nagai is the creator of manga anime classics such as *Cutey Honey*, *Devilman*, and *Mazinger Z*, which first debuted on Japanese TV in 1972. *Mazinger Z* featured the evil Dr. Hell with his aspirations of ruling the world. Aided by his chief flunky, the half-man/half-woman Ashura, and the iron-mask troops, Dr. Hell uses various giant robot monsters to carry out his evil schemes. To combat Dr. Hell, Dr. Kabuto created the giant robot Mazinger Z, piloted by his son Koji. Although Dr. Kabuto is killed by Dr. Hell, Koji manages to continue the fight against Dr. Hell with the assistance of Dr. Yumi and his daughter Sayaka who pilots the giant robot, Venus A. In 1974, *Mazinger Z* was followed up by *The Great Mazinger*, and in 1975, the next in the series was *UFO Robo Grandizer*—this third series featured Koji only as a supporting character.

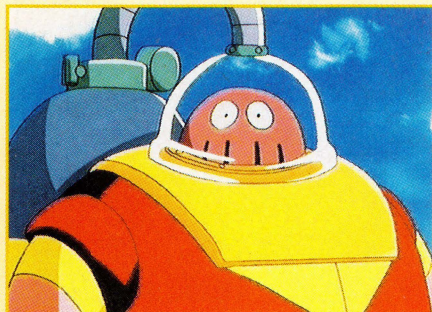
Mazinkaiser shows the return of Koji as the main character, this time piloting an updated and more powerful Mazinger called Mazinkaiser. Volume 4 of this OAV series shows that even heroes who save the world need some recreation once in a while. It starts off with Koji, his brother Shiro, Sayaka, and the other regulars of the series relaxing at the beach. The fun doesn't last for long, however—one of Ashura's robot monsters appears and kidnaps Sayaka and Venus A. Koji and Boss go off to save her, but Ashura and the iron mask troops manage to capture Koji and Mazinkaiser! What will become of them!? With the crazy plot and character stylings of Go Nagai, this is classic retro anime at its best. Go Nagai go!

ANDY NAKATANI



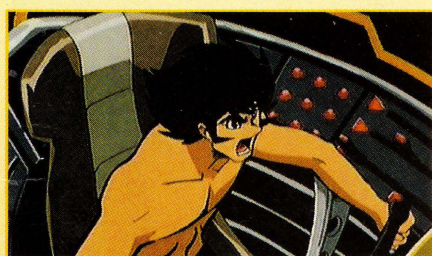
BEST OF THE EAST

anime REVIEWS



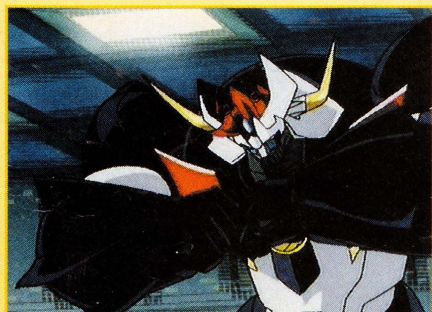
URIAN

What can anyone say when confronted with the sheer power of Go Nagai? This guy is a genius pervert. He is the Einstein of slapstick dirty-bird anime. How many times can seeing a woman getting her clothes ripped off be funny? One, two, three...zillion times? I don't know, but this man will find out if anybody does. Naked girls, chubby guys falling hairy-butt-first into hermaphroditical villains' faces, giant robots piloted by a sexy guy in a tight black Speedo, plus a fun day at the beach is more than enough to entertain me for an hour. *Mazinkaiser* is as funny as a French tickler and twice as naughty.



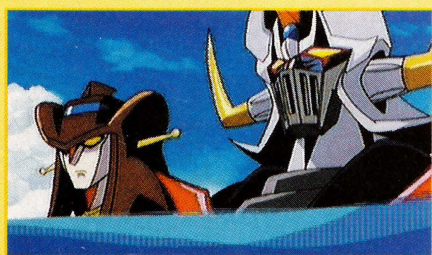
PATRICK

Too many anime remakes and sequels get it all wrong. They redesign old characters until they are unrecognizable and mess up what made the original work in the first place. Not so with *Mazinkaiser*, which sallies forth as if the Super Robot spirit of the Seventies never went away for a single moment (of course, for crazed fans, it never did). The vastly pleasurable action comedy flavor of Go Nagai's original anime is kept intact, aided now by the juvenile lechery that was once confined to the manga version-only. There's not much in the way of new insight (aside from the dining habits of Dr. Hell), but who cares when a relaxing day at the beach—with giant robots in tow—can turn into a loopy adventure of escape and capture? All I ask for maybe a little more death and mass destruction. A super robot show, even a Nagai one, can't run on jokes and jiggle alone. At least, not forever (one hopes).



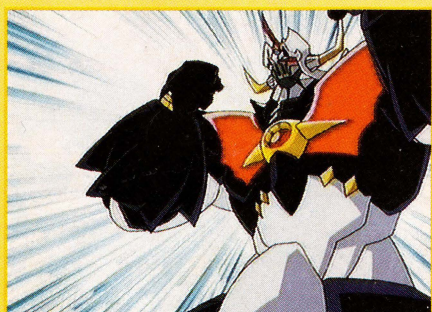
KELLI

Okay, this will probably date me but I remember watching *Mazinger Z* on TV when I was young. Big robots were the thing and I was totally into it: Aphrodite A (or was it Venus A in that one too?) and the great Mazinger would do their turbo-smash punch taunting Dr. Hell and his clan! Then time slipped by and I just plain forgot about it. As I was watching *Mazinkaiser* I couldn't believe my eyes—it was like seeing friends that you haven't seen in decades! But, they were new and improved. To top it all off I saw Sayaka Yumi's boobs! This is definitely a show that takes you back to old school anime. There is action, drama and a ton of comedy all rolled up in one great show, and you will get to revisit old friends too!



MAI

I have great love for Super Robots. I have greater love for *Mazinger Z*, since Go Nagai is the God Freak of anime—and that's in my own words, of course. I mean, *Devilman* was a weird idea and so was *Cutey Honey* (I won't even get into *Kekko Kamen* or any of his other out-there stuff here), but sitting through one episode of original *Mazinger Z* is all you need to be convinced that there was some weird stuff in the water in Japan back in the '70s. Does anyone do villains like this anymore? No! And that is an absolute crime. Tentacle-waving robots, a mad scientist named Dr. Hell, a freaky hermaphrodite sorta like the one in *Bride With White Hair* (and what do you wanna bet this is where they got the idea?), and a new generation of heroes and their healthy crime-fighting exploits. It's *pure*, that's what it is. Mainline stuff. Robot rush. And goofy bathing suits.



S.CRY.ED VOL. 5

2001 animated TV series directed by **Goro Taniguchi** (*Mugen no Ryvius*), script by **Yosuke Kuroda** (*Trigun*, *Tenchi Muyo!*), with visual concepts by **Noriyuki Jinguji**

In the near future, an independent territory called "The Lost Ground" has established itself inside of Japan. The territory is a chaotic place containing areas of luxury and wealth, poverty stricken slums, and barren wastelands. Among some of the people born and raised in "The Lost Ground" are people born with special powers called "Alter abilities." They have the ability to change the molecular structure of specific things around them—for example some can alter their own bodies, some can alter mecha, and some can alter fruit. The people with the Alter abilities start fighting each other and an organization called Holy attempts to gain control of "The Lost Ground" using a special forces group made up of agents with Alter abilities.

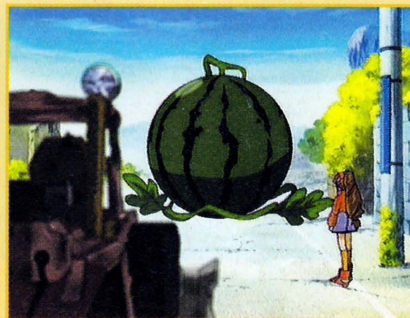
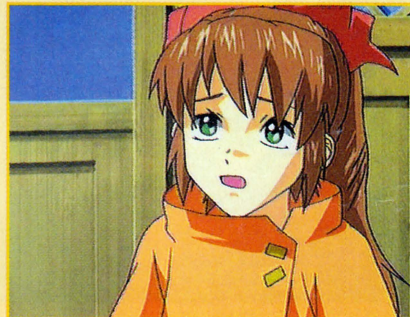
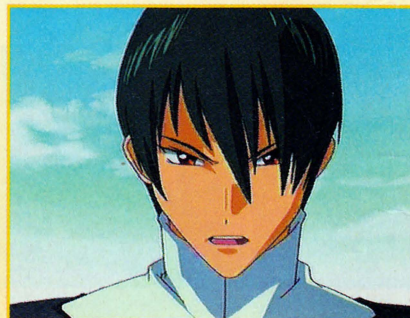
Kazuma is a 16-year-old kid from "the Lost Ground" who has Alter abilities. Teamed up with a young punk named Kimishima, Kazuma uses his powers to do mercenary work for hire. He lives with an eight year old girl named Kanami and is very protective of her. Kazuma finds himself increasingly at odds against Holy as the organization gains more control over "The Lost Ground." In particular, he clashes with an agent of Holy named Ryuho who has incredible Alter abilities. In this volume, Holy takes over Kanami's home village and declares Kazuma an outlaw. Kazuma and Kimishima attempt to break Kanami out of the village but things go awry and Kazuma goes on a rampage. Kazuma and Kanami get separated, and Kanami, her aunt, and uncle get captured by outlaws and are forced into slave labor when a mysterious stranger comes to their aid.

Although the artwork and the colors of *Scryed* look really good, the jerky-looking animation irritated me, preventing me from having any interest in the story. Maybe I just needed to drink some coffee...or maybe I drank too much coffee...

ANDY NAKATANI



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BEST OF THE EAST

anime REVIEWS



URIAN

Take your favorite anime and toss them in a blender, mash it all up good into a flavorless paste and then serve in the cheapest china and you have *S.CRY.ed*. What exactly is a *S.CRY.ed*? The dictionary says: *N. New anime consisting of: cheap animation; preposterous super cataclysmic Def-Con-One battles; cheesy porno-star lookalikes complete with gold chains, moustache, and mullets; and a lot of jibber-jabbing.*



PATRICK

I hate to take this one all the way back to the schoolyard, but a little birdy walked by this anime when it was playing and went "cheap, cheap." They must be living on instant ramen and rainwater over there at Sunrise judging by the use of video effects and limited animation here. The story and script are said to be the tops, but with everything that's green and orange pushed to the forefront, there's not much in the way of eye candy. If anything, the art direction is wildly inconsistent and sometimes it is hard to believe you are watching the same show from scene to scene. To be fair, there's a spectacular mullet to admire, the giant teleporting watermelon is mildly amusing, as is the puzzling assertion made by the rawkin' closing theme "I BELIEVE IN DRASTIC MY SOUL," but I don't think it is going to replace *Samurai Pizza Cats* anytime soon.



KELLI

I have a feeling that a lot of people will love/hate *S.CRY.ed*, but I haven't come to a conclusion myself. I really enjoyed the characters: they are people that you want to get to know—no paper-cut-out anime characters here. The story is intricate and filled with suspense, you can't beat postapocalyptic premises where mankind is in shambles, superhumans roam the Earth, and government factions try to control them. *But* everything is a bit heavy on the heart and there is a lot of drama. I definitely found myself engrossed but need a few more episodes to decide whether I love/hate this show and I suggest you do the same.



MAI

Some of you may have thought I was a cute little creampuff, but there *are* things I hate in this world, none of them more than the sound of my own voice when I pull out the cranky ol' fan within, always bitchin' about how "things were better in the old days." But damned if *S.CRY.ed* didn't remind me of an old-time Sunrise sci-fi show in which you may not have a single freaking clue what's going on with any of the characters at any one moment, but you're convinced it'll be something cool eventually. The main character's whole retro-'80s "look at me, I'm like the *Spriggan* and/or *Orphen* guy!" fingerless-gloves-and-leather-vest look had me smiling just from the sheer nostalgia value. And great fight scenes! Superhero neutron blast stuff! Excuse me—gots to go listen to some Duran Duran now.

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Character Designer, *Mobile Suit Gundam*

Animation Director, *Mobile Suit Gundam: The Movies*

Mech design by

SHUNJI OKAWARA

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Letters to the editor animessages



WRITE TO US!

ANIMERICA welcomes letters from its readers. Address correspondence to **ANIMERICA, Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 77043, San Francisco, CA 94107**, or send e-mail to

animerica@vz.com. We are unable to answer letters individually. Letters may be printed in the magazine, posted to our web site (**www.animerica-mag.com**), or both at some future date. Concise, typed letters have the best chance of being published. Your mailing address will not be printed unless you specifically request it. Full mailing addresses will not be posted on the web site. We reserve the right to edit for space or clarity.

FOR THE RECORD

We take pride in being the best-researched anime magazine in America...and we want to stay that way. If you spot a factual error somewhere in the magazine (no, typos don't count) and you're the **FIRST** person to send in a postcard about it, you'll get a special prize and our thanks. If you're *nice* about it, that is....

Send postcards only (no e-mail) to: **ANIMERICA Gaffe Squad, P.O. Box 77043, San Francisco, CA 94107**. Be sure to include your full home address, so our hand-picked team of specialists can deliver your prize.

IN DEFENSE OF HINATA-SOU

Hey, Animessages, let me start by saying I couldn't agree more with Brandon Niven's inset editorial in his feature on **Love Hina** in the May '02 issue of **ANIMERICA**. The first anime I ever watched (waaaaay back in the day, close to nine years ago) was **Ranma 1/2**, in dodgy eighth-generation-taped-off-TV-in-EP-mode VHS, so Mr. Niven's comparison of **Ranma** to **Love Hina** was particularly apt and resonant with me (although I seem to recall Ranma going directly *through* walls more often than bouncing off them à la Keitaro!). And it's worth noting that Mr. Niven (and the "critics") are dead-on; **Love Hina** is pretty derivative. If you follow through all the clichés that **Ranma** "established" (for many American fans at least)—from the main character being romantically chased by a veritable plentitude of cute girls, representing every stereotypical female archetype—to the romantic-comedy undertones flowing through the series, **Lova Hina** delivers on all counts.

So why do I like **Love Hina**? That's easy...why should I not? Every single piece of anime is probably, in one way or another, heavily derivative from a few, seminal pieces of work, unique plot twists and tweaks aside. I'd personally count anime like **Akira**, **Ghost in the Shell**, **Here is Greenwood**, most of Miyazaki's work and the virtually incomprehensible but brilliant **Utena** movie as some of those unique artistic visions that AREN'T derivative (I don't include **Eva**, because a) I've never seen it and b) despite the apparently unique perspective it takes, it is, at its roots, a giant robot show).

Love Hina is no different from a hundred other domestically available anime in being a derivative work...so why slam it for that? After 100 years of motion picture history, I'd argue that most of the stories that can be told, have been. I mean, I worship Rumiko Takahashi (my favorite all-time anime and manga is **Maison Ikkoku**), but if you **REALLY** look at it, all her stories—from **Urusei Yatsura** all the way through to **Inu-Yasha**—are pretty much the same.

Look, all I ask for when I fire up the DVD is for some good old-fashioned entertainment. I know I've seen it all before, but hey, if it makes me laugh, and takes me to another reality for a little while, isn't that what storytelling is all about? Long live Hinata-Sou!

—David Chu

KARE KANO IS THE BEST!

Thank you, thank you, thank you, for Vol. 10, No 5's feature on **His and Her Circumstances**. I have waited for almost two years for word of that show to be licensed, and what seems like even longer for it to be featured in the pages of your magazine. And to also find out that the manga has been licensed by TOKYOPOP...it's almost too much. My head is swimming. I cannot put into words how obsessed I am by **Kare Kano**. It is possibly my favorite thing ever. It is one of the few anime that every one I've shown it to, even non-

anime fans, has instantly loved and watched the whole series within a couple of days. I recommend it highly, especially to girls who like **Kodomo no Omocha** (**Popstar Kodacha**), **Love Hina**, **Evangelion**, **Furi Kuri** (**FLCL**), **Marmalade Boy**, or whoever might wonder what it feels like to be involved in a bittersweet romance at a Japanese high school. So, once again, thank you for the article.

However, one mistake was made, and I must bring it to your attention for the good of posterity. Tsubasa's family name is Shibahime, not Shibaki as was printed both in the body of the article and the character profile. Please make note of it. Also, print my e-mail address, because I'd like to know if anyone in cyberspace is interested in collaborating on an Arima x Asapin *dôjinshi* site.

With much sincere love,
—Amanda Beth Watts-Feldman; **MAGENTAwf@aol.com**

Our author replies that when preparing the article, he'd been using Gainax's own English-language website for a resource, since the final translations/name renditions were at that time unavailable from The Right Stuf. (See the description for Episode 10 on www.gainax.co.jp/anime/karekano/list/01_10-e.html.)

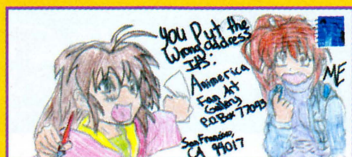
SPOILING THE FUN

Let me start off as most people do...I am a fan of your magazine. I like the new layout; I feel I get more for my dollar with the new format. I love the information that your magazine provides. Your magazine has introduced me to more than one new anime title I was previously unaware of and has helped solidify a few questionable titles I was interested in. But I have one major complaint that I regret must be voiced to you.

I appreciate that your articles and reviews try to give us readers a very in-depth and detailed analysis of various titles. However, on more than one occasion, the information provided has been too much; in other words, articles and reviews have a recurring tendency to include spoilers. For example, in the latest issue (Vol. 10, No. 5), there is a review of **Metropolis**. In the second to last paragraph, it reads "**Metropolis**...ends just where it should. The great city of the future lies in ruins." I fortunately had seen the movie prior to reading this article, but I am sure you have readers who haven't. This seriously takes away from the effect of the climax of the film. Anime is one of the most groundbreaking media forms around. The sheer variety of titles and sub-genres allows for many different tastes to be satisfied and new ones to be embraced. The writing of anime stories have surprised me more than once. **Jin-Roh** cleverly led me to one conclusion, only for my mouth to be left agape during the credits. Now, I know that the movie would have lost a great deal of impact had I known the true direction the film was going.

I had an interest in seeing **Love Hina**, but after reading the article and the character descriptions, I am no longer

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interested. Even if Naru turns out NOT to be the girl Keitaro is seeking, I think it should be left to the storytellers to lead me astray. While I personally would prefer for your articles and reviews not to contain spoilers, I know that what I am saying may be much easier said than done. I would even appreciate some warning that spoilers are contained within. Even in your review of **Maetel Legend**, you state that this anime is the first time Maetel and Emeraldas have been depicted as sisters. There may have always been that suspicion, but now that I know, why would I really feel compelled to watch? The fact of seeing the two with "baby fat" simply is not motivation enough.

I am asking you please to reconsider the manner in which your articles are written. Anime is still very much a media that appeals visually and emotionally to its fans. It is a shame that the effects of such a powerful combination (aesthetics and emotional storytelling) are cut in half by too much information. Please keep bringing us information on the latest and greatest titles domestic and abroad, but please consider that while knowledge is power, absolute power corrupts.

—Rashard Williams; rashardwilliams@cox.net

*Our modus operandi is to avoid spoilers; we're well aware that too much information is not necessarily a good thing. However, when discussing a work such as **Metropolis**, it's difficult to go into the film in any depth without talking about the plot in some manner. Likewise with **Love Hina**—how can we get people interested in watching a series if the story is totally off limits? We DO put a lot of thought into what to reveal or not reveal, and—believe it or not—not everything is meant to be a surprise. The fact that Maetel and Emeraldas are sisters is not a "spoiler" in regards to **Maetel Legend**—you are told this immediately in the video. The point is watching the story unfold, where it takes you, what it tells you about these two characters. The journey, not the destination. In general, we're asking you to trust us to know the difference between "set up" and plot development—the first is okay for us to talk about, and we do. The second, we leave to you to discover.*

VOICE IMPRESSIONS

Many thanks for April's Sound Bites interview with Dorothy Melendrez. The first time I encountered her work was in **Battle Athletes** (the OVAs and **Battle Athletes Victory**) and I've been a fan ever since. I try to see all her stuff but hadn't gotten around to **Trigun**. When she said Meryl Stryfe was her favorite role (frankly, I was expecting Kris Christopher), I had to run out and get the DVDs. And while **Trigun** is fairly interesting (I especially liked how the tone of the story darkened as it progressed), for me it was the character of "Derringer" Meryl Stryfe that made the series so enjoyable—an experience I might never have had were it not for your interview. Most people remember Vash's "Peace and Love" bit, but for me it will always be Meryl's description of Vash in the second episode: "That droopy-eyed, cocky, upside-down-haired, woman-chasing lunatic, who's nuts for donuts and gorges them like a starved hog in heat." Now that's voice-acting!

—Dan Boudreau; boudreau@atlantic.net

WOLF HOWL

I recently purchased **Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade**, and I have to say it's one of the best anime movies I have ever seen. Though it seems like some other very popular titles like **Metropolis** and **Spriggn** have been released. I wanted to know how you guys felt about **Jin-Roh** compared to other popular movies like **Princess Mononoke**, **Ghost in the Shell**, and **Akira**. I remember you guys saying about a year or two ago that it was pretty good when it came to Japan.

—Drseus45@aol.com

*We agree that **Jin-Roh** is a major film—anime movies come in several different flavors, from compilations or follow-up to already established anime series to original stories that just use animation as a storytelling medium rather than a particular platform or style. **Jin-Roh** is one of the latter category—it could have been done in live-action, but because it wasn't, the artistic choices made by the animators add whole new layers to the story. At any rate, we're glad you enjoyed the film. If you haven't already, you might want to check out one of our back issues, **ANIMERICA** Vol. 9, No. 5, for our exclusive interview with Mamoru Oshii about the movie. Check out the Viz store website at <http://store.viz.com/> to order.*

WHAT'S ON IN JAPAN

I read a recent letter online that talked about what's on TV in Japan right now, as opposed to what is available in America right now, or soon to be. In your response, you generally stated that most people aren't interested in what's going on in Japan right now, because those titles may or may not be available in America two years from now. Well, I agree with you, but I would also say that 75 percent of the American anime viewing audience only cares about **Dragon Ball**, **Sailor Moon**, **Pokémon**, **Zoids**, etc. Yet you cover a lot of other anime in your mag to cater to the "smaller" audience that buys what I would call the good stuff (just my personal opinion). So even though the market is smaller, it is still important. So what I'm basically trying to say is, yes, we do care about what is on in Japan right now. Man, we HUNGER for this stuff! To put an end to my rambling, remember that some of us skip the eight pages on **Zoids** (and, sure, some don't) and skip right to the Best of the East...why not throw a few more "what's on TV in Japan now" columns in? I know it's an American anime mag, but no one else covers anything going on in Japanese anime (besides Japanese websites). Nice to have a decent anime mag in English, regardless....

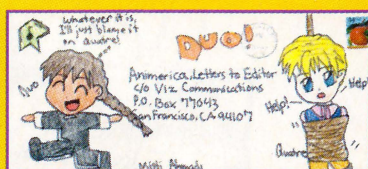
—sean

*As in our response to the original letter ("Keeping Up With the Times," **ANIMERICA** Vol. 10, No. 4), staying current is important to us too...except that with only so many pages to work with, we often have to prioritize what to cover in the magazine, and what's brand-new in Japan necessarily has to take a back seat to what's new in America, often simply because it's hard to confirm details on something that's brand-new. (It's actually possible to be too far ahead of the curve—in the past, we've reported on Japanese series "in production" that were never finished due to budget issues.) Depending on series length and the health of the anime industry in general, new TV shows can air in Japan at a rate of up to 80 a year...and that's not even getting into original videos. It's a lot to keep up with AND cover everything that's new in the U.S. as well. We made the choice a long time ago that we'd rather cover the North American market well than try to cover everything poorly, and we still use that as our guiding rule when it comes down to a decision about what titles to talk about.*

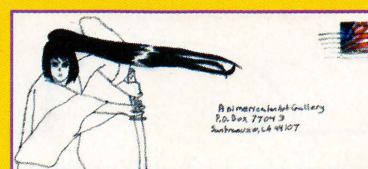
*Which is not to say that we have NO plans to remedy the situation. We'll be adding a column soon discussing Japanese live-action film and, with luck, expanding Best of the East to include mini-reviews. So balance is the goal—we want to be able to give **Zoids** watchers the background info they're looking for AND give fans with a sweet tooth for imports something to look forward to. It may not be the best of both worlds, but we'll see how close we can get. ☆*



Name Unknown • Richmond, VA



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S. Katz • Phoenix, AZ

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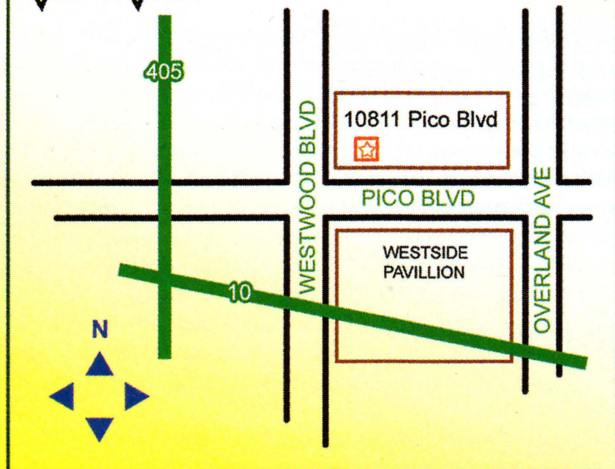
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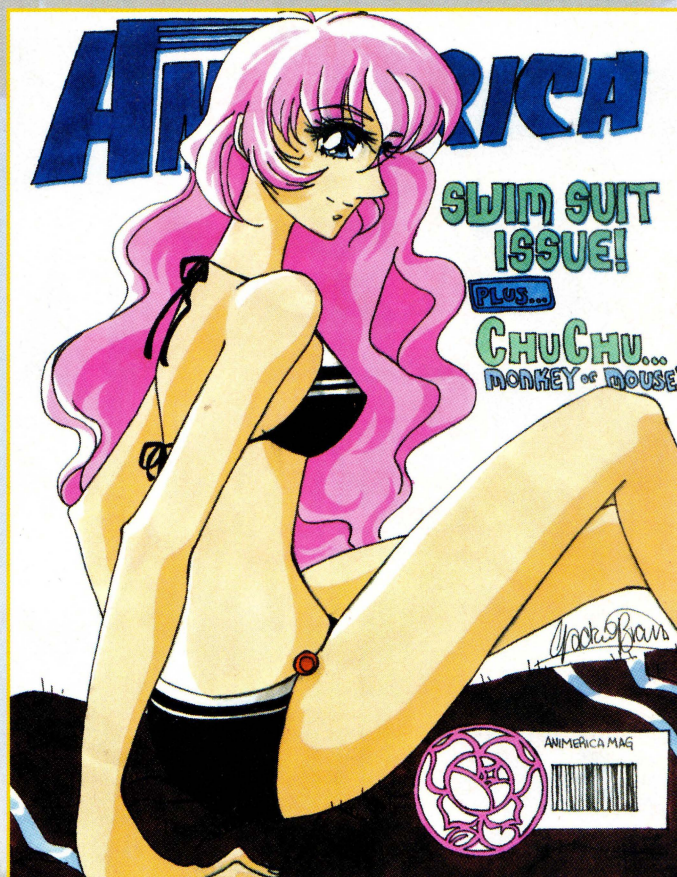


SWIMSUIT ISSUE THE WINNERS

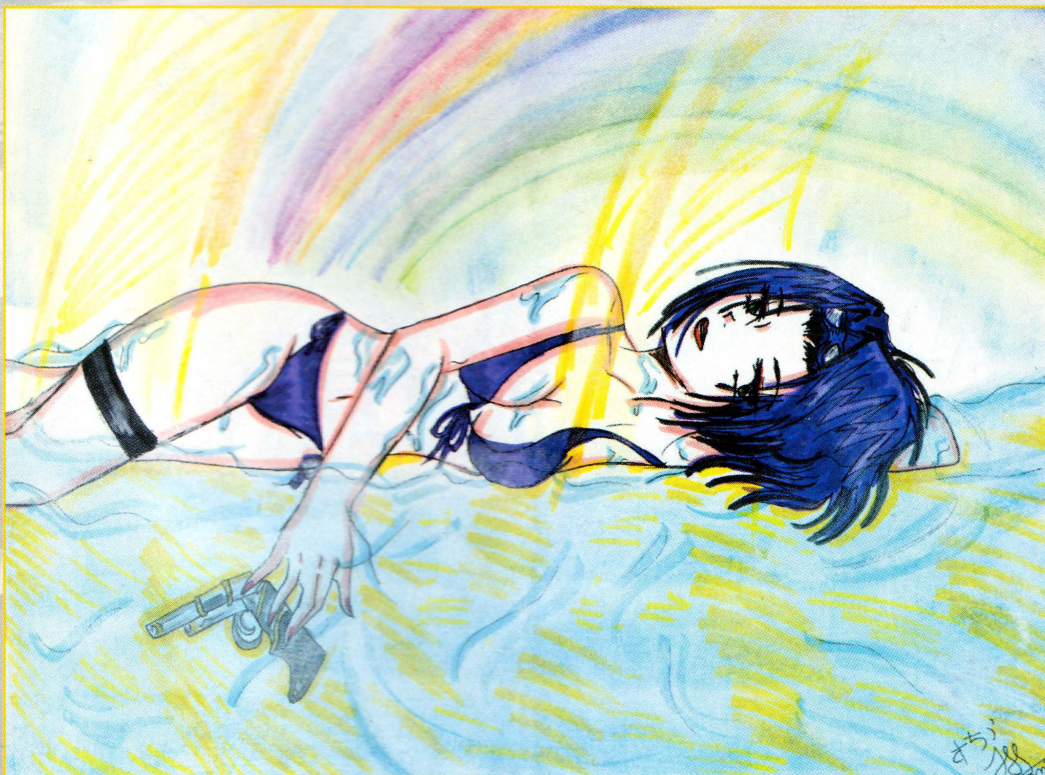
Wow! We got so many great entries this year that we're going to be doing the winners' section TWICE!

You heard right—check back next issue for even MORE winners of our annual contest featuring your drawings of the best of anime and manga's bathing suit beauties!

Now, on with *this* month's winners!



Utena Tenjou (*Revolutionary Girl Utena*)
Jackie Brown • Bloomington, IN • Age 18



Faye Valentine (*Cowboy Bebop*)
Lauren Hasbrouck • Reddick, FL • Age 14

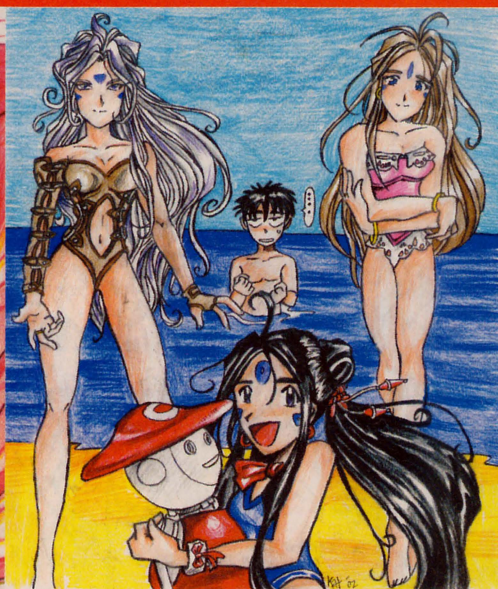
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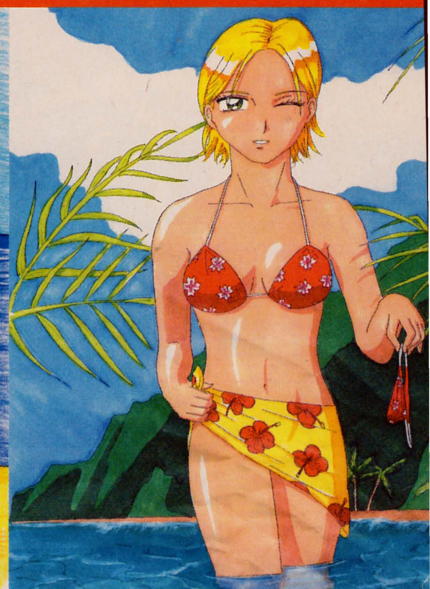
Utena Tenjou (*Revolutionary Girl Utena*)
Janet La France • Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada • Age 18



Usagi/Serena (*Sailor Moon*)
Brienne Jorgensen • Helena, MT • Age 17



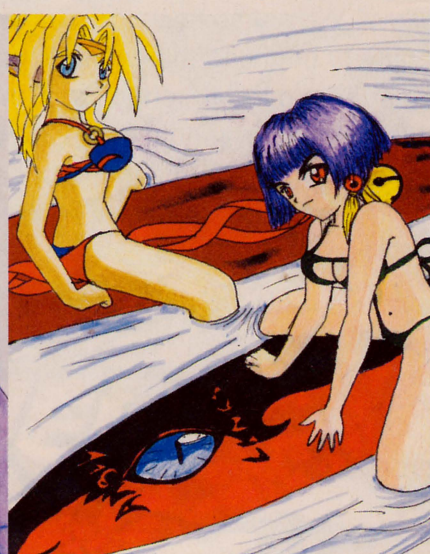
Bellodandy, Urd, Skuld, and Keiichi (*Oh My Goddess!*)
Kathryn Hudson • Holly Bluff, MS • Age 16



(Original Character)
Jon Atkins • Jacksonville, FL • Age 20



Sasami and Ryo-ohki (*Tenchi Muyo!*)
Emily Humphries • Spokane, WA • Age 12



Meifong Li (*Angel Links*) & Aisha Clan-Clan (*Outlaw Star*)
Yezemia Reytor • Miami, FL • Age 19



Yuna (*Final Fantasy X*)
M. Robertson
Cincinnati, OH • Age 24



Boogiepop Phantom (*Boogiepop Phantom*)
Allison Chang
Reading, PA • Age 13

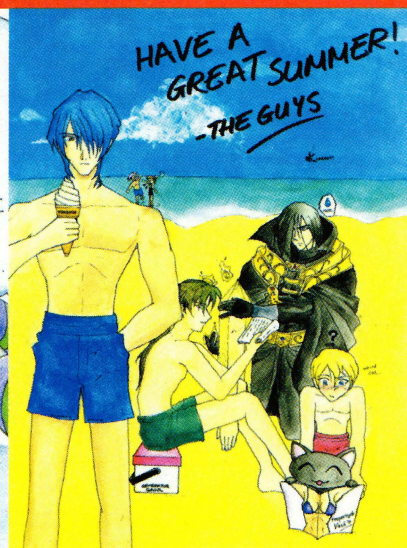
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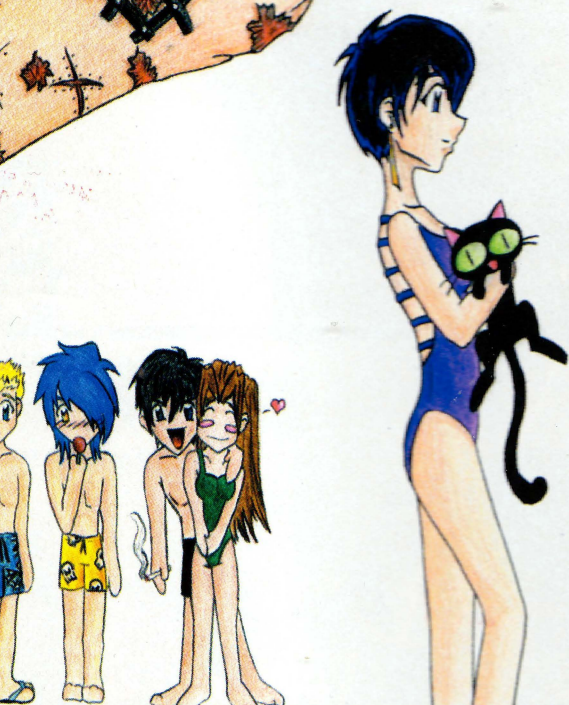
Vash the Stampede (Trigun)
Jamie Swift
Gardnerville, NV • Age 15



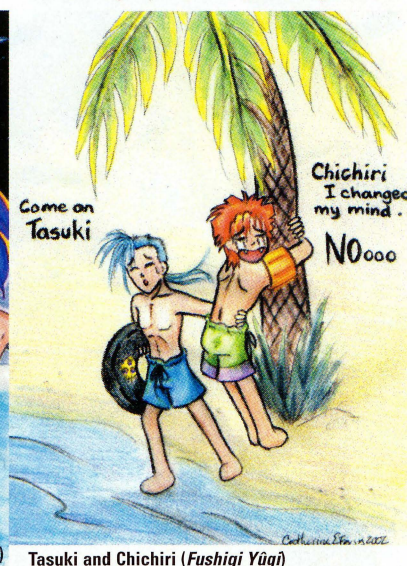
Asuka and Shinji (Evangelion)
Sarah Myer • White Hall, MD • Age 17



Legato Bluesmimmers, Kuroneko (Trigun), Sacher Torte (Sorcerer Hunters), Ryo, Koji (Generator Gawl)
Kami-Li Cheng • Tyne and Wear, U.K. • Age 18



Cain Tepes and Shido Tatsuhiko (Night Walker: Midnight Detective)
Tiffanee Niitsu • Forest Grove, OR • Age 23



Tasuki and Chichiri (Fushigi Yûgi)
Cathy Faris • Richmond, VA • Age 23



Inu-Yasha (Inu-Yasha)
Margaux Hymel • Mandeville, LA • Age 14



Aburatsubo Ayanojyo (Magic User's Club)
Katherine Hallberg • Philadelphia, PA • Age 15

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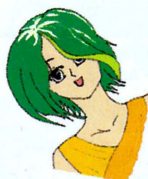
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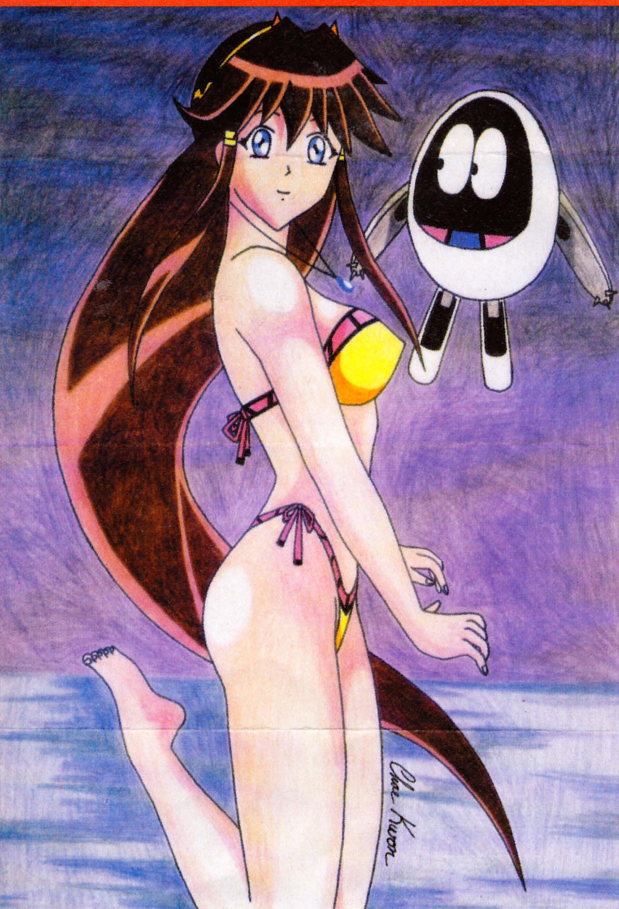
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Jen M. Colby • Littleton, CO • Age 21



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Sapphire (Princess Knight)
Lena Sawin • Lexington, MA • Age 15

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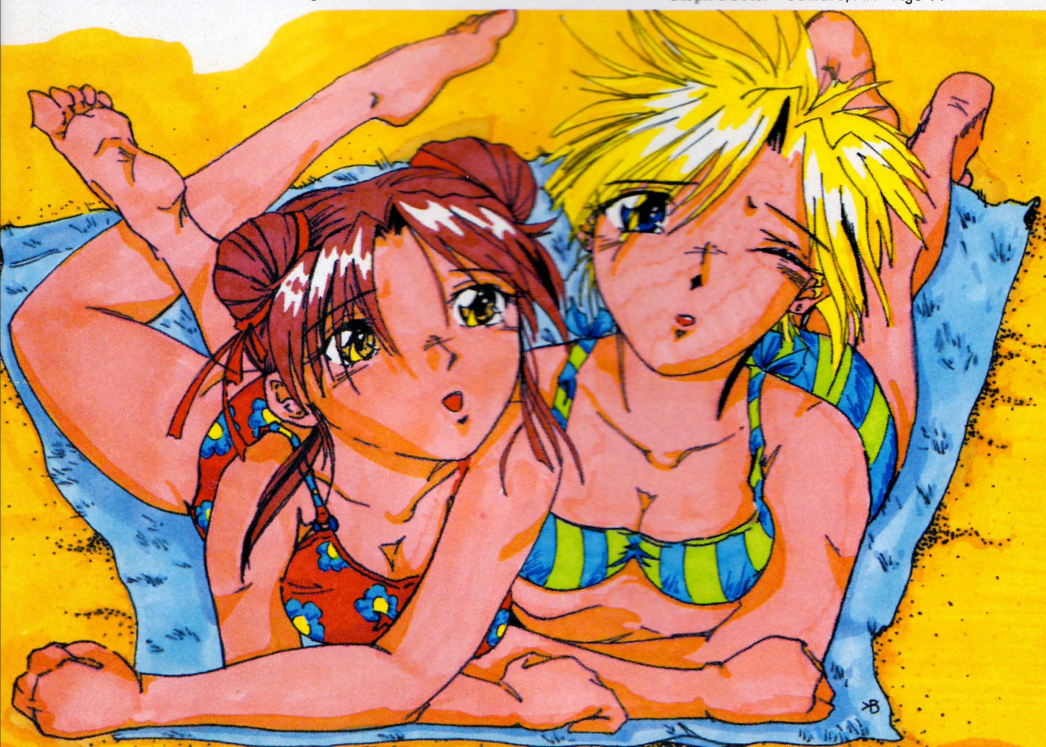
Bulma (Dragon Ball Z)
Charlie Alvarez • El Paso, TX • Age 20



Edward and Ein (Cowboy Bebop)
Kim Stocker • Berea, KY • Age 16



Miyu and Larva (Vampire Princess Miyu)
Steph Deeter • Seward, AK • Age 14



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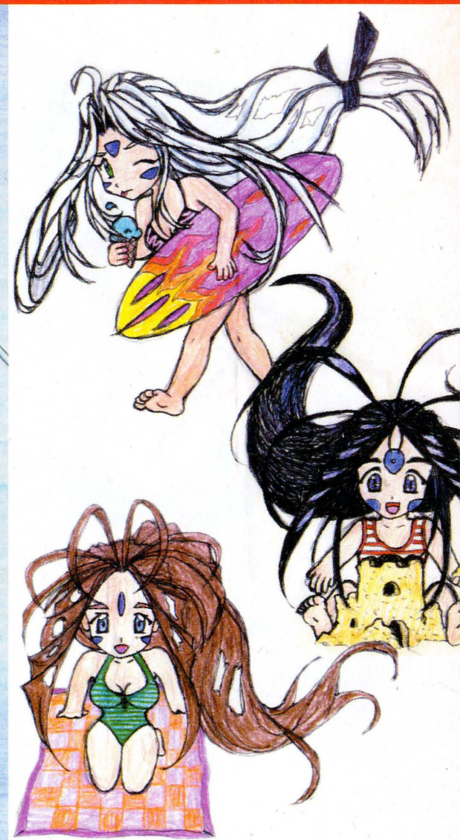
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Edward, Ein, and Faye (*Cowboy Bebop*)
Mindy Swartz • St. Clair Shores, MI • Age 14



Chun Li (*Street Fighter II*)
Sarom Ek • Columbia, MO • Age 15



The Mini-Goddesses (*Oh My Goddess!*)
Tianna Fisher • Naples, FL • Age 20

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Details: Make your artwork **no larger than 8½" x 11"**! No e-mail entries. Please send your illustrations by postal mail. Color illustrations are preferred to black-and-white. Artwork will not be returned. If you don't want to send your originals, color copies work just fine! **Clearly label** each piece of your artwork **on the back** with your **name, address, age**, and the name of the character you're illustrating.

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This theme will appear in **Vol. 10, No. 10**, Theme deadline is **10 AUGUST**

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Based on the comic "GTO" by Tohru Fujisawa originally serialized in the WEEKLY SHONEN MAGAZINE published by Kodansha Ltd.
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ANIMERICA CONTEST
HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN WIN THIS MONTH!

GTO

Win **GTO** DVDs and graphic novels from TOKYOPOP!



GRAND PRIZE (1 winner)

- 1 set GTO DVD (Vols. 1-3)
- 1 set GTO graphic novels (Vols. 1-3)

FIRST PRIZE (2 winners)

- 1 set GTO DVDs (Vols. 1-3)

SECOND PRIZE (2 winners)

- 1 set GTO graphic novels (Vols. 1-3)

HOW TO ENTER

Just pull your readers' response card out of the magazine, fill it out, fold it over, tape it shut, stick a stamp on it, and send it to us! You don't have to subscribe or anything—you're automatically entered to win!

CONTEST DEADLINE:
1 AUGUST 2002

THIS MONTH'S WINNERS!

Here are the winners from our contests from **Vol. 10, No. 5:**

METROPOLIS DVDS

Michael T. Green •
Washington, D.C.
William Fedora •
Durham, NC
Felipe Orta • San
Antonio, TX
Pamela Malsom •
Sammamish, WA
Laura H. Tran • San
Jose, CA

REAL BOUT HIGH SCHOOL GRAND PRIZE

(DVD, CD, graphic novel)
Kevin Filas • McHenry,
IL

FIRST PRIZE (DVD, CD)

Valerie Aube • Upper
Tumon, Guam
Sabrina Sondhi •
Cypress, CA

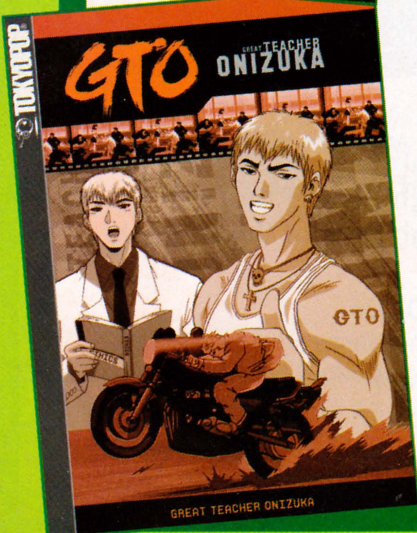
SECOND PRIZE (graphic novel)

Klint Mallery • Salem,
OR
Sonia E. Resto •
Highland Falls, NY
Edward Arcena • San
Diego, CA

**MORE WINNERS
NEXT MONTH!**

CONTEST RULES

No purchase necessary. Employees of Viz Communications, Inc., TOKYOPOP, and those associated with Animerica magazine are ineligible to enter. Winners' names will be announced in the magazine. All prizes will be sent out following the winners' notification. Viz Communications is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Winners will be selected by random drawing by the staff of ANIMERICA. Good luck!



the anime fan's comic magazine

ANIMERICA

EXTRA

Vol. 5, No. 7

REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA

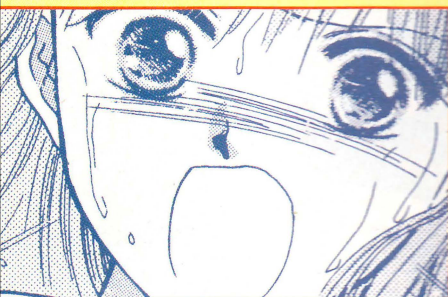
By Chiho Saito, Story by Be-Papas



A duel between Utena and Touga, but if he's her prince, how can she fight him?

FUSHIGI YÛGI

By Yu Watase



Miaka and the warriors are lost in the realm of the Chinese Amazons.

VIDEO GIRL AI

By Masakazu Katsura



A vacation at the beach with Yota, Ai, Moemi and Takashi becomes very revealing.

The Special **EXTRA** in this issue is the beautiful art of Yû Watase in a free full-color poster! Also enjoy an overview of the work from the "God of Manga," Phoenix's Osamu Tezuka. Top it all off with the who-dunnit manga genius Kindaichi.

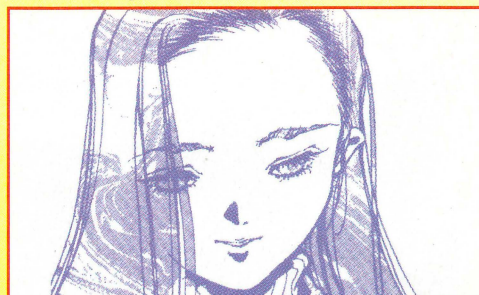


**ON
SALE 7
JUNE**

Revolutionary Girl Utena © SAITO
CHIHO/IKUHARA KUNIHICO & BE-PAPAS,
Fushigi Yûgi © Yû Watase,
Chicago © 2001 Yumi Tamura & Shogakukan,
Marionette Generation © Haruhiko Mikimoto,
Video Girl Ai © 1989 Masakazu Katsura,
Steam Detectives © 1995 Kia Asamiya

MARIONETTE GENERATION

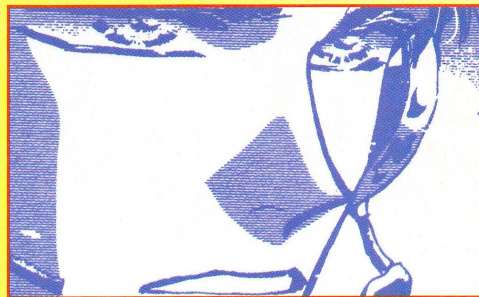
By Haruhiko Mikimoto



Ill omens of a beautiful girl that will enter Izumi's life.

CHICAGO

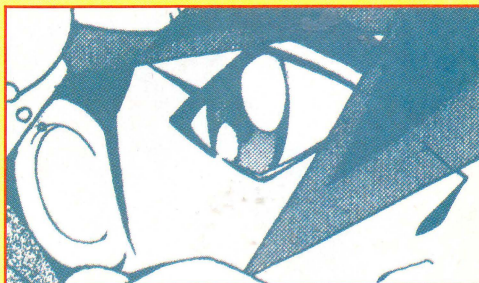
By Yumi Tamura



The climax! Can Rei, Shin, and Uozumi rescue Billy?

STEAM DETECTIVES

By Kia Asamiya



Spend a day with Ling Ling!

COMING IN THE NEXT
ANIMERICA
ANIME & MANGA MONTHLY アニメ・マンガ

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JULY 12

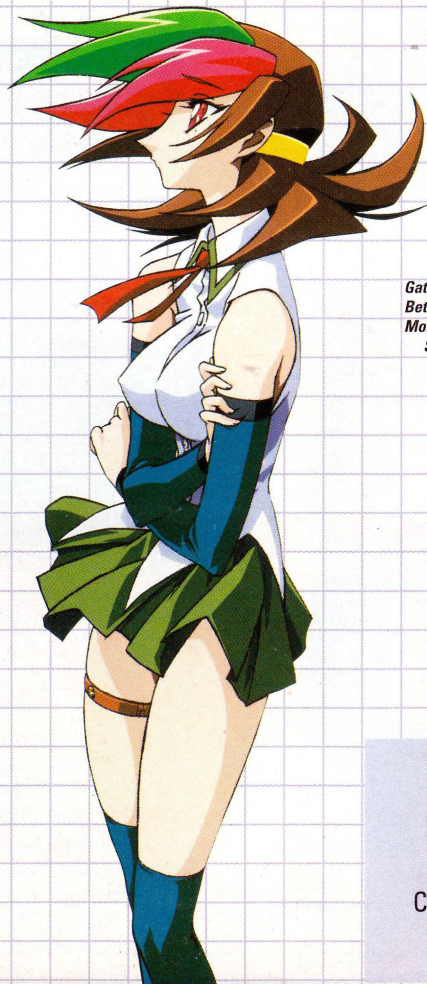
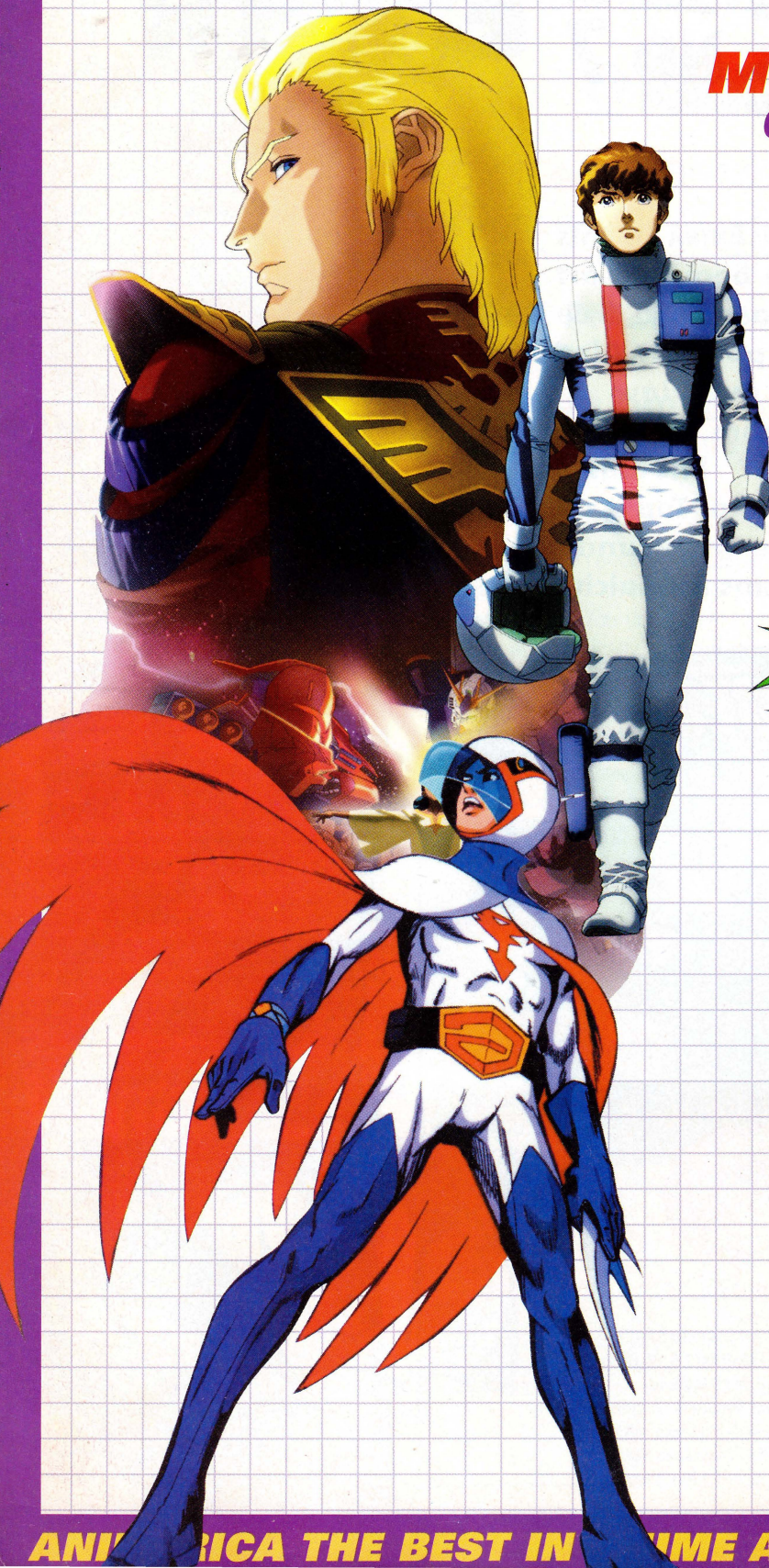
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CHAR'S COUNTERATTACK**

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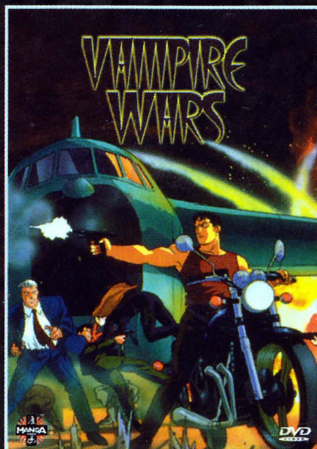
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